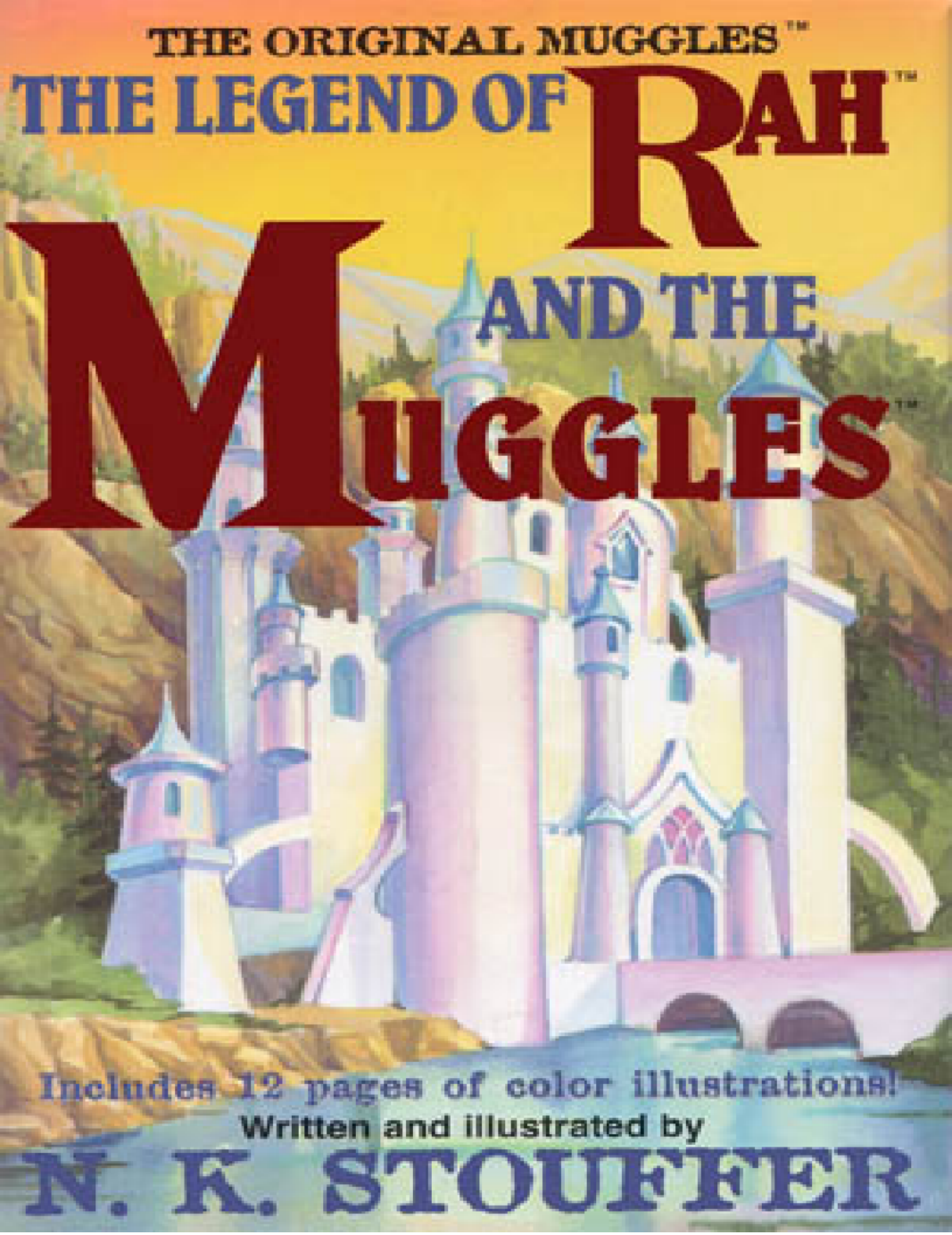
THE ORIGINAL MUGGLES™

THE LEGEND OF RAH™ AND THE MUGGLES™



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The Legend Of Rah And The Muggles

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DEDICATION

To my mother who always believed in me; my husband who patiently and silently gave me stability in the midst of chaos; my children, who are my greatest inspiration; and my father, who drifted away with angels before he had a chance to see his “Nan B. Nan’s” dreams come true; and last, but never least, my friends who have stood by me, knowing that one day those dreams would arrive.

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INTRODUCTION

On the far side of the earth, Aura citizens fought great wars with other nations. They had lived a relatively peaceful coexistence until government representatives became restless and greedy. The need for power and control seemed to spread throughout the Congress of United People, C.O.U.P., like a disease out of control. The discord caused great unrest within the colonies. Absent any real or decisive leadership, citizens gathered arms and formed militia groups.

These splinter revolutionaries were determined to reclaim democracy, and preserve the legacy their forefathers had given their lives to make possible.

To most of Aura's citizens it appeared that all of this unrest had occurred suddenly, when it had actually taken years and years of corruption and political maneuvering to tear apart the very fibers of the Constitutional Charter. This Charter made democracy possible for all nations and gave its citizens inalienable rights. It was masterfully written to insure that the citizens would control the government, and it was intended to prevent government intrusion into the private lives of the citizens.

Leadership of the C.O.U.P., headquartered in Aura, had gone unchecked by its citizens for many years as they enjoyed prosperity and freedom. Little by little this complacency gave rise to corruption. Nations that were intended to include and respect the rights of all people regardless of heritage or color had slowly mutated into countries defined by class distinction, nations of haves and have-nots.

This seemingly simple erosion of morality gave rise to gross civil unrest, and massive wars resulted. Aura's citizens suffered catastrophic hardships and losses. The wars forever changed life as Aurians once knew it.

They lost the freedom and liberties they had worn like a comfortable pair of old shoes. The Great Thirty-Year War would be recorded as the most vicious and evil in the history of mankind. Senseless battle after battle had nearly destroyed everything.

Although the C.O.U.P. arms treaties had boasted the elimination of nuclear weapons, it was the reassembly and use of such weapons that brought this anguishing war to a sudden and devastating conclusion.

Forests and valleys, farms and villages lay in waste. Only barren battlegrounds were visible where beautiful estates had dotted the landscape and productive farms once thrived. Here the lingering radiation made it impossible for ordinary human life to be sustained.

The nuclear holocaust had blanketed the sky with dark poisonous clouds of radiation. The sun disappeared behind the radiated eclipse just as Aurian citizens fled their homeland. Beaten, tired, and nearly starving, they deserted the ruins, leaving behind the imprisoned have-nots: the injured, the disabled, the ethnically impure, the elderly, and other less fortunate human beings.

No mercy was shown to even the children of the abandoned citizens. Their cries for help went unrecognized as they rang out with piercing resound. Despair painted their tiny faces like a mask of terror. Moans of anguish echoed in the air with dizzying repetitiveness as the have-nots struggled to clear the debris from the entrance of their cavernous prisons.

The self-appointed “chosen ones” felt no pity for the have-nots they had entombed in shoreline caves. In their minds there could be no reason for a have-not to survive if it meant one of them would not.

They gathered in crowds along the shoreline to escape on the few remaining cruise ships, where most of them had once enjoyed luxurious vacations with their families. Now all that these luxury liners represented to them was a way to escape. They pushed and shoved, trampling one another like a herd of cattle to secure their place on a vessel. Ladders and ropes and planks of all kinds were filled with people trying to crawl and climb aboard.

The ships’ captains had armed and locked themselves inside control rooms to maintain absolute command of the vessels. As the ships filled to an overflowing capacity, the command was given to leave the port. Planks broke away from the ship decks, while desperate people futilely reached out for a helping hand aboard. Others were left still clinging to ropes and ladders that dangled along the sides of these iron ocean monsters. As the mammoth ships floated off to sea, the ropes and ladders were cut from their sides, dropping the unlucky ones into the murky and stormy water, never to be seen again.

It is hard to imagine that anyone left behind in Aura could survive, but they have. The power of the human spirit was never more vivid than it is now, nearly five hundred years later. Against all odds, a primitive generation of human beings, the Muggles, who are

descendants of the have-nots, now inhabit the land. They have never experienced the warmth of sunlight, nor the beauty of an evening sky filled with glittering stars. Their world is lit only by moonlight shining through a purple haze left behind by nuclear warfare.

Muggles look much like human babies, but none of them have hair. Their shoulders are narrow and delicate. They have round, plump bellies, which make their legs and arms look very thin.

Muggles have smooth, soft skin. At one time their skin was cold and blue from the lack of sunlight and oxygen, but now they have creamy white, beige, or brown complexions, and little, pink cheeks. Even when full-grown they look like children.

The Muggles speak many different languages and understand all others, even those of the animals. Some think Muggles' voices sound faint, but that is because they are very tiny. Their average height is three and one-half feet.

The only knowledge Muggles have of their ancestors and the history of Aura are the stories that have been passed down from generation to generation. These stories are found within the pages of the historical ancestral diary known as the Ancient Book of Tales.

The Ancient Book of Tales has become a record of every event that has taken place or is taking place in Aura and in the lives of the Muggles. It describes traditions and survival methods, and records births, deaths, and achievements. Every Muggle child is educated by guidelines set forth in the Ancient Book of Tales, and is expected to live by the moral standards described in this historical book.

The tradition of record keeping continues to this very day. This book is the Muggles' only link to the past, their legacy for the future, and the most treasured possession of the Muggle community.

It has been said that history repeats itself, and many, many years after the Great Thirty-Year War, another nation was growing restless. Their actions would bring about change that reached far beyond their borders and would profoundly affect the lives of the Muggles.

In this distant land, the chilling sounds of a raging war echoed in the background. For you see, this land, too, had nearly been destroyed by great wars.

And so, the Ancient Book of Tales tells us—

In The Year of the Purple Haze

People had forgotten the power of love and sought power in place of love.

A home may be of simple structure,

And yet yields more beauty than mansions;

For the timbers from forests of dreams,

That built this simple place,

May crumble to bits and pieces with age,

But the love that gives this home its grace,

Will keep flowing for years yet to come…

Down rivers and streams of time,

Quenching the thirsts of mankind,

Bathing your soul from time to time,

Healing the sick and mending the blind;

For within your heart, not your mind,

Is where all love is truly defined,

And its symphony plays on and on,

Long, long after we have gone.

–

Chapter One: The House of Sheridan

Lady Catherine had barely escaped from her family's palatial estate before the enemies arrived. The sound of the battering ram echoed through the hallowed halls each time it struck the huge wooden doors of the palace. She could hear the aged wood snapping like dried twigs as the hand-forged hinges broke away from the framework. The doors fell against the marble entry floor with explosive force, just as she entered the secret underground passageway.

"Cat," a nickname given to her when she was a child, had spent time preparing for the possibility that the day may come when she would have to leave her lifelong home. She was hoping that her work and worry would be proven unnecessary, but everything happening around her made it clear she had not been overly cautious.

The palace staff and their families had sought refuge within the home of the Royal Family weeks before. They fled the streets of their villages, leaving behind their cozy cottage-like homes nestled in the valley below La maison d'or, (the house of gold), Lady Catherine's estate.

Just as Cat had inherited her station in life as a member of the Royal Family, so, too, had the staff inherited their positions within the palace. The staff was respected and loved by Lady Catherine. She was only three years old when her parents died of influenza, and she became Lady Catherine of the House of Sheridan. They had become her family and were trusted confidants for many years before her marriage. The staff had always been there for her, and now, she would be there for them.

Gwenie had served as Cat's nanny until her marriage to Sir Geophrey Luttrell. She was anxiously awaiting the birth of Lady Catherine's twins when the war began to escalate. Gwenie wore her age extremely well. Her silver-white hair neatly framed her plain but attractive face. She was tall and thin, and carried herself with a well-schooled charm.

Sir Geophrey, commander of the nation's largest infantry, had left Walter Randolph Winfred Cherrington, the palace butler, in charge of La maison d'or. Walter's youthful chiseled features, dark peppered-gray hair, and piercing blue-gray eyes mesmerized guests he greeted at the door.

He had impeccable taste and manners that came naturally to him. His

black tux jacket hung squarely over his defined shoulders. His soft deep voice exuded authority, and his mannerisms reminded admirers of his place within the family.

Walter was a man with great pride and cherished his position. Cat had always wondered why a lady had never captured this gentle man's heart. Walter was only four years older than Lady Catherine, and had assumed the position of butler following his father's death.

Until recently only Gwenie, Walter, and Cat knew about the secret war shelters and passageways beneath the palace. They hadn't been used since the eighteenth century, until now. Walter pushed one of the brass ornamental fixtures on the fireplace mantle and shoved his muscular frame against the huge, stone wall next to it, until it opened. The entrance to the ancient escape route appeared like magic. It was dirty, but its darkness offered security and hope.

Lady Catherine and Walter explored the ancient passageways, carefully mapping every possible hiding place and avenue of escape. Gwenie summoned others to begin the tasks of cleaning and stocking the underground hideaway with every available supply necessary for survival. Should the need arise, they would be prepared.

Everyone worked very hard. In two days' time the entry room had been filled with racks and racks of bottled water. Twelve-foot-high shelves lined the center of the room like a library. Here canned vegetables, eating and cooking utensils, linens, blankets and medical supplies, portable lights, lanterns, and containers filled with kerosene were stacked neatly, filling every available space. Dried meat hung eerily from hooks in the ceiling of the hidden ironstone rock room.

Gwenie had been very busy making sure that everyone was doing the jobs they were assigned to do, while Walter and Charlie, the groundskeeper, secured the palace windows and doors.

Charlie took the first two floors, and Walter took the third and fourth floors where the bedchambers were located. Even though a cloud of doom seemed to be approaching, Walter still maintained the decorum and privileged access to certain parts of the palace.

Only Walter, Gwenie, and Lady Catherine's personal maid, Audrey, were permitted beyond the second floor. Walter would not cause Lady Catherine the embarrassment of having the groundskeeper enter her private room, not now, or for any reason.

Grasping the gilded staircase railing, Walter stepped up onto the huge,

plushy carpeted stairway, turning, hesitating only momentarily to take an admiring glance at the beauty of this home. It had been his home, too, and he couldn't help but think of all of the wonderful people who had graced the halls of this magnificent building.

When Walter reached the fourth floor, childhood memories rushed through his mind. He remembered the sounds of Lady Catherine's laughter as the two of them played games in these very same hallways as children. They had secret hiding places that only he and Cat knew about. As he now knocked gently on her chamber door, he felt like a little boy again.

It had only been an hour ago that he had last knocked on Lady Catherine's door to deliver a letter to her. He had hoped that his knocking again would not interrupt the sleep she had desperately needed. Cat had walked miles with him, mapping the passageways. It had to be tiring for a pregnant woman to walk such distances, but she never complained, not once, he thought to himself.

Walter knocked gently once again, leaning closer to the door. He heard Cat crying uncontrollably. He quietly turned the gold door handle until the ten-foot-high mahogany door opened.

"Pardon moi, Madame," Walter whispered. "Shall I summon the midwife?" he asked nervously. Still, she did not respond to him.

As Walter approached the side of Lady Catherine's canopy bed, he couldn't help but notice how beautiful and vulnerable she looked. He bent down, and ran his fingers across her forehead, pushing her long golden hair away from her face. He had never seen her like this—tears streaming down her face, her body trembling with grief.

"Madame, how may I help you?" he asked nervously.

Lady Catherine's eyes appeared to be staring into thin air, and still she did not answer him.

Walter sat down on the side of the bed and lifted her limp body slightly until her head rested on his shoulder, his arm supporting her back. Holding her tightly, he looked down into her eyes. "Please, please tell me how I can help you, Madame," he compassionately demanded.

Cat looked into those magical eyes of Walter's and said nothing—she simply raised her hand, her fingers clenched tightly around the letter he had delivered to her earlier. He pulled the letter from her delicate

fingers while he continued to hold onto her tightly, so tightly he could feel the babies moving in her belly against his chest as he unfolded the parchment, and began to read it:

Lady Catherine of the House of Sheridan:

It is with supreme regret and sadness that we must inform you of the death of your husband, Sir Geophrey Luttrell.

He served this nation bravely and honorably and we share in your grief.

Commander of the United Forces

He had to be strong, he thought to himself as tears welled in his eyes, too. Sir Geophrey and he had grown very close over the years, and their trust in one another was made clear the day Sir Geophrey left to command his battalion.

“Take care of Cat while I’m gone. She would like everyone to believe she is strong, but she is not always as strong as she pretends,” he instructed Walter.

Walter hadn’t forgotten the promise he had made to Sir Geophrey; he had always watched over her, and that wouldn’t change now.

Cat cried and cried, until she fell soundly asleep in Walter’s arms. He worried about her as he covered her with the satin quilt that had been folded neatly at her feet. He left her side only momentarily, to pull a large, blue-velvet stuffed chair up to the bedside. Could she and her unborn babies survive all of this trauma, he wondered.

Walter situated himself on the chair next to Lady Catherine’s bed, propped his legs on the side of the mattress, with his feet crossed at the ankles, and attentively watched Cat as she slept. It wasn’t long before he, too, drifted off to sleep.

The quiet night was soon interrupted by screams coming from Lady Catherine’s chamber. Walter jumped out of the bedside chair with her first moan and called for Gwenie and Audrey.

“Help! Help me!” he yelled into the hallway. Gwenie, awakened from a sound sleep just at the other end of the corridor, came running.

By the time Gwenie reached the room, there was no question that the babies were going to arrive before they could summon a midwife.

Audrey, who had followed Gwenie into the room, didn't need "how to" instructions, she had helped deliver a few babies in her village and had two of her own at home.

Gwenie and Audrey hurriedly gathered the things they would need. Audrey filled a large porcelain basin with water and set it on the nightstand next to the bed. She unfolded a stack of clean white towels and washcloths, and laid them on top of the bed. Gwenie fluffed the soft goose feather pillows and placed them behind Lady Catherine's back and neck to make her more comfortable. Just as she began to draw the canopy drapery closed, she noticed Walter was still in the room.

He appeared to be so nervous and panicked that Gwenie thought it was best he wait outside in the hallway. "Isn't there anything that I can do?" he asked as Audrey escorted him through the doorway.

Walter paced back and forth in the hallway just outside the chamber door. Every time he heard Cat scream, he jumped or gnawed his fingernails frantically. It had seemed like eternity to Walter, but the moans and screams were soon replaced, first by one crying baby, and then two.

The sound of crying babies painted a smile across Walter's handsome face. He was so elated he jumped for joy, but quickly regained control of himself, and took a quick look around him to make sure no one had seen him doing such an absurd thing.

Just as quickly as Walter had felt joy in the birth of the twins, his smiling face saddened with the thought of Sir Geophrey's death.

Audrey came to the door about thirty minutes later and said, "Walter, my Lady will see you now."

Without hesitation he briskly walked into the room.

So many conflicting thoughts and emotions filled him as he entered the chamber—he was saddened, he felt honored and privileged, and he was awestruck by the sight of Lady Catherine sitting up in her bed with a newborn son in each of her delicate arms.

"I'm not sure what to say, Madame, at a time like this, so I will simply speak from my heart. I am so sorry, and yet filled with such joy for you. I will be here for you and help you any way that I can," he said as a tear fell from the corner of his eye.

Gwenie had returned to take the babies to their awaiting room and matching cribs. As she left with the infants, Lady Catherine reached out to Walter with open arms.

“You have already given me so much. How could I ever ask you to give more? I shall never forget your loving arms when I most needed someone to hold me.” With that she gently took his face in her hands and looked into his eyes, and then kissed his forehead.

No other words were exchanged. Walter, afraid to speak as he stood beside her bed, just smiled, turned, and walked away.

With each day and night that passed, the sounds of war loomed closer to La maison d’or. Walter and other staff members knew their days were few inside the walls of the palace. The time to escape was rapidly approaching. Lady Catherine gave instructions for a feast to be prepared—fit for a king, to honor the staff—and to serve it in the main dining room.

Lady Catherine arrived in the dining room just after seven o’clock in the evening. She was dressed in a twilight-blue silk gown, beneath a floor-length robe painted with blooming pink roses, and white flowered dogwood branches, belted loosely at the waist with braided gold ropes.

Gwenie placed the babies in linen-lined baskets just outside the dining room—she didn’t want them far from her sight.

Lady Catherine had asked Walter to join all of them for dinner. He had never eaten at the same table with either the staff or with the family, but tonight formality was being tossed aside and it felt comfortable.

Name cards had been placed at each place setting, with the exception of the two single chairs at either end of the enormous table. Everyone had taken their places behind their assigned seating when Walter took his place behind Lady Catherine, and pulled her chair away from the table to seat her. As he gently slid her chair back toward the table, he could smell the oil of lilacs she must have dabbed through her hair and on her neck.

Sensing him close behind her, she reached behind her head and guided his towards hers. She turned her head to meet his ear; he could feel her breath with each word she whispered. “Walter, I would be honored to have you join me, seated at the head of the table,” she said quietly.

Walter was shocked but refused to show it. He had never denied her anything she had asked of him, and this was certainly not the time to question her request.

The war had changed everything, even the way people thought about each other. It was strange, but amidst the terror everyone was feeling and the uncertainty of their futures, they somehow found a new understanding and respect for one another. For just this dinner they would put their fears aside and try to enjoy what they had with Lady Catherine. After all, if not for her taking in all of their families, they would surely have never stood any chance of surviving.

The dinner proved to be the perfect medicine for a house filled with the stress of the war, its uncertainty, and the tragic loss of so many young lives. Soon joy and laughter filled the room as everyone enjoyed one another's company, the stories told and the wonderful food.

Gwenie noticed the time on the gold watch she wore on a chain around her neck, "Please excuse me, everyone," she said with the watch still her hand. "It is nine, and the children and I must retire for the evening. It has been memorable, and I thank you all!" she added as she rose from the table.

Walter followed her up the staircase carrying the babies in his arms, and he was smiling from ear to ear the entire way. He loved these children as if they were his own. His attentiveness to the babies had not gone unnoticed by anyone. Had Walter realized that, he would have dissolved into embarrassment. No one said a word to him, but they couldn't resist smiling when his back was turned.

As Walter reappeared on the staircase, everyone was leaving the dinning room. Lady Catherine walked up to him just as he reached the last step.

"Join me in the Great Room," she said as she slipped her arm beneath his.

"Most certainly, Madame" he said playfully, and winked at her.

Still holding his arm, Lady Catherine leaned back ever so slightly, looking into his gorgeous face with a humorous grin.

"Why, you handsome diplomat! I didn't know you could be so wicked," she said.

Walter just couldn't help himself. He responded, "I'm flattered that you noticed."

"Noticed what, Sir, that you are handsome, or wicked?" she chided back.

He swung her around in front of him, and looked right into her eyes. "Either way, Madame, I win, and that is what is important to a man at a time like this," he said in a sassy manner.

They both began to laugh aloud. "Touche, you handsome devil," Cat responded as they entered the room.

At the end of the Great Room were a grand piano, harp, cello, and a violin that was neatly placed atop a red velvet-covered stool.

Beautifully hand-loomed Persian rugs of different patterns with similar color schemes covered the hardwood floors. Furniture was placed in arrangements around the rugs that encouraged intimate seating, places where groups of people could sit casually in conversation.

The furniture was large, with soft, stuffed velvet seats and backs. Sculptured walnut lion heads topped each chair and settee, and claw feet supported their frameworks.

Sheridan family portraits dating back as far as the fifteenth century, adorned the walls the entire length of this thirty-foot-wide and fifty-foot long-room. The gilded gold frames around the painted oil portraits were reflective of this family's long and opulent history.

Everyone had spread out in the room, finding a comfortable place to sit and enjoy their demitasse after dinner. The good conversation and laughter had been carried with them from the dining room.

Audrey and Kathleen, her eighteen-year-old daughter and the first-floor maid, gravitated toward the piano and harp.

Kathleen sat down on a chair behind the harp, leaned it toward her, and began to pull her fingers across the strings. The room was suddenly filled with heavenly sounds from this two-hundred-year-old instrument.

Audrey soon joined her daughter at the piano, and Charlie shocked everyone when he picked up the violin and led the two women in an impromptu rendition of Pachelbel, Canon D. Before long everyone in the room who had musical talent was participating.

Lady Catherine stood watching in amazement as they all skillfully played these instruments that she had only ever seen them dust and care for. How joyous it was to hear music in this home again, she thought to herself.

Standing with her back turned toward the rest of the room, she hadn't noticed Walter behind her. He was also listening, and watching Cat as she began to hum, swaying subtly as she held the front of her silk gown slightly off the floor.

"Would you honor me, Madame, with a dance?" he asked her from behind.

She turned to him still holding her gown with her fingertips, then stepped toward him dropping the blue silk to the floor.

"Why, you really are a handsome devil, aren't you, Sir," she said as she rested her one hand on his shoulder and gently laid the other hand into his.

He slipped his arm underneath hers and wrapped it around her tiny waist until his hand was resting firmly below her ribs. He pulled her close to him.

"I'll take that as a compliment!" he said jokingly as he waltzed her across the polished wooden floor.

Before long, others had joined them on the dance floor. They danced and danced in the candlelit room—husbands and wives sharing laughter and love. No one seemed to notice that Walter's electrifying eyes were mesmerizing Lady Catherine.

Walter saw nothing but her in the room, and she struggled with the emotions that seemed to be settling in her throat in a huge lump she was unable to swallow. Her heart was pounding. She was hoping that Walter didn't feel it as they whirled round and round.

Just then Walter drew her even closer to him, bending his head down beside hers, until his lips nearly touched her ear. "Madame, it is not I who is the wicked one in this room!"

She nearly fainted in his arms, and he felt her knees weaken, but wondered if he was misunderstanding the mood of the evening, when she pulled her head away from his and looked right into his eyes.

"Sir, there is no woman in this room that wouldn't trade dance

partners with me right now; I'm not about to give them the chance. If that makes me wicked—so be it!" she said with a poor attempt at a Shakespearean delivery, and they both laughed.

Walter had thought he felt the floor trembling a few times while he and Lady Catherine were dancing, but ignored it. Now the rumbling was unmistakable and everyone in the room felt it.

The music stopped and they could hear bombs dropping from the sky, whistling as they fell through the air just before they hit the mountain ridge that was only twelve miles to the east of the estate.

"Everyone knows what to do!" Walter exclaimed as they scattered to carry out the plan.

Lady Catherine and Walter ran up the staircase as fast as they could to get Gwenie and the babies. Gwenie was on her way down, already at the top of the second floor staircase, struggling to carry both babies and their supplies. Just as Walter grabbed the infants from her arms, they heard the sounds of approaching soldiers.

Cat, Gwenie, and Walter, who was holding on tightly to the babies, ran down the last flight of stairs and darted around and underneath the open staircase. Here Gwenie opened a small service entrance for the library and held it open until Lady Catherine and Walter had entered the room. She locked it tightly in place and ran to the safety of the secret passageway opening.

Everyone else had already entered when Walter handed the babies to Gwenie and she disappeared into the darkness. Lady Catherine had just stepped inside the doorway when she heard the battering ram knock the old wooden door from its hinges.

"Hurry, Walter, please hurry," she cried.

Walter jumped in and slid the stone wall closed, with not a moment to spare.

When he turned around, Lady Catherine was standing, petrified, right behind him. Her face was filled with terror. Walter scooped her up in his arms and carried her down the stone steps and into the passageway.

The tunneled passageways were lined with arched stone openings that either led to another tunnel route, or opened into tiny rooms that must have been used for staff quarters centuries ago. Each little room

had stone platforms on either side resembling beds, and little stone shelves situated at places on the walls.

Some of the rooms still had old pottery scattered about. Some of the wooden doors were still functional; others had to be repaired or replaced by Charlie. Every one of the seventeen rooms was needed to house the forty-three people now hiding in this underground colony. The rooms had been stocked weeks before with water, an oil lamp, and enough blankets and linens for at least two people.

Everyone was quiet and situated in rooms when Walter carried Lady Catherine into the last available room.

She was quietly crying as he tried to lay her on one of the crude beds. Cat was so frightened that she wouldn't release her grip from around Walter's neck. He sat down with her resting on his lap. Walter remembered holding her in his arms to comfort her only a few weeks ago, but this time it was differentthey were both frightened and he needed her as much as she needed him.

"I'm worried, Walter. What will happen to my sons? What will happen to all of us?" she whispered in a quivering voice.

"I'm not sure, Cat. I'm not sure what will happen to anyone. I wish I could promise you that we will all be fine when this is over, but I can't," he said.

The bombing thundered above them for three days and nights, and then stopped. Guns could still be heard firing sporadically throughout the fourth day and night.

Everyone underground was still very frightened that they would be discovered. Each evening when it was quiet above, Walter heard both men and women praying in their rooms as he checked the passageways.

Lady Catherine spent time with the boys while Walter slept, and Walter would stand guard while Lady Catherine slept. But today, the sixth day they had spent underground, Lady Catherine asked that the children stay with her all day, without Gwenie or Walter.

Walter was curious about her request. She had not spoken much to anyone for the past three days, not even him. He could see that she was troubled, but Gwenie had reassured him that she was fine. What neither of them understood was that Lady Catherine had made a decision, the most difficult decision she had ever made or would ever

have to make.

She had asked Charlie to build a raft for her about a month before the twins were born. He had never asked her why, or for what purpose; he built it willingly without any questions asked.

Lady Catherine asked him to hide it by the water's edge. Charlie tied the raft there and camouflaged it with giant lily pads. No one would ever notice it unless they knew where to look for it, and only Charlie and Lady Catherine knew its location.

Walter had been up all night and all day. He had been trying to give Cat the time alone with the boys she had asked for, but he couldn't seem to rest sitting up in the passageway.

"Cat, I am so sorry to interrupt you, but I am so very tired. Would you mind if I just lay my head down for a bit while the boys are asleep?" he asked.

"How selfish of me, Walter. I had somehow forgotten about time and you. I am truly sorry. Please, please come in and lie down over here with the babies," she said as she took his hand and walked him to the beds side. She tenderly covered his tired body, and he fell fast asleep with the boys at his side.

Lady Catherine had not discussed her plans with anyone. She knew what high levels of radiation would do to the twins' tiny bodies, and she was not going to allow that to happen. It was only a matter of time before nuclear warfare would be used to bring this war to an end —only a matter of time, she thought to herself as she struggled through the dark passageways with the babies strapped to her back.

It took Cat over an hour to locate the right tunnels that would lead her to the exit by the water. This escape doorway had been hidden by years of overgrowth. She and Walter discovered it while they were mapping the tunnels. That map would have made tonight's journey easier, but there was no way she was going to risk trying to pull it from Walter's pocket. He would have surely awakened had she attempted to take it from him.

The bayberry shrubbery thorns dug into the delicate skin of her hands as she frantically pulled and tore the overgrowth away from the passageway opening.

It was just before dawn when Lady Catherine exited from the darkness of her hideaway. The sun was just beginning to rise when she sat

down underneath a huge willow tree. Here, Cat began to pull the deeply imbedded thorns from her painful and bloodied hands. She had never felt as alone as she did now, she thought as she dipped her hands into the cool, soothing water. She watched the blood run from her wounds and spread out over the top of the water.

Many different emotions filled her weary mind—she felt angry because her husband had died, she was terrified that her children would have no future if they stayed here with her, she felt saddened that she may be falling in love with Walter and would never live long enough to share her life with him.

All of these thoughts were filling her very being when she laid the boys on the raft.

She had taken a jewel box from her chamber and hidden it in the passageway a month before. Its etched, glass top displayed a view of the crystals and other precious stones she had placed inside. The box was secured with a solid gold framework and lock.

She opened the box one last time with the key she kept on a chain around her neck. Her trembling hands folded the parchment letter she had written to her sons before sunrise this morning. After placing it securely inside, she once again locked the box.

Lady Catherine gently situated the children on the wooden raft covered with giant, forest-green lily pads. She covered them with a quilt of silk, monogrammed with her family's crest. The quilt had always been folded neatly at the bottom of her lace-covered, canopy bed. She took her delicate fingers and tucked the plentiful fabric beneath the boys' tiny bodies until they were snug.

Between them she placed the jewel box, and wrapped the gold chain and key around one of her son's tiny hands.

Lady Catherine stroked each one their tiny foreheads and kissed them on each of their cherub-like cheeks. She held back her tears just long enough to push the raft out into the water, then cried out in pain as the raft quickly slipped from her fingertips and out of her reach.

It floated slowly away as she looked on. When she couldn't bear to watch any longer, she turned back toward the tunnel entrance. There, by the opening, she could see Walter standing with outstretched arms.

Chapter Two: The Light

The babies' tiny wooden vessel drifted down mountain streams, then to wide rivers, and finally, into a great ocean. Atop their ocean cradle, the twins were rocked to sleep by the rhythmic motion and soothing sounds of the waves. The brisk, ocean breeze hurried them on their journey.

The boys spent many days on the water. They slept through the first eight days. The morning of the ninth day they were awakened by gentle whispering voices.

"We are Naddie and Neddie from the Sea of Nebula. Spooners from the deep, sent here especially for you." Then they giggled, each one sitting on an opposite side of the raft.

The babies began to giggle, too, as the misty young girls tickled their chins. "Drink, drink little bahbies," they said playfully as they fed the twins until the blue crystal bottles had completely emptied.

The wind whistled across the raft, and just as fast as they had arrived, Naddie and Neddie were gone.

With their bellies full again, the boys fell fast asleep, until the morning of the eleventh day, when out of the blue ocean water arrived a very large sea cow.

"B—be—be—Benjamin here," he said as he peaked up and onto the raft, catching a glimpse of its passengers.

"Well, wha—wha—what do yaknowa—a—about dat!" It's the ba—bah—bahbies Naddie and Neddie were tal—talking ah—about," he stuttered to himself.

"We got—got—gotta ge—get ya ou—ou—out—a here! There's a st—stor—storm ca—ca—comin'," he stuttered nervously as he grabbed onto the raft's rope with his mouth and slowly headed toward the Southern Sea of Nu.

Benjamin had barely advanced a mile when he heard "Yo—Benjamin! What do ya got there?" Buddy the barracuda swam up beside the stressed sea cow.

"Ya th—thin—think I c—ca—could ge—get—get a li—HI—little he—

help here? Got—gotta ge—get this r—r—r—raft ou—outta here for—fore the st—stor—storm c—c—comes," Benjamin replied.

"Why, sure, but what are ya towin' there, Benjamin?" Buddy asked as he swam up to take a look for himself. "Who are they, Benjamin?" he asked.

"Wh—wh—why the—the—they're Naddie and Ne—Ne—Neddie's bah—bah—bahbies," he answered.

"I didn't know Naddie and Neddie had any bahbies," Buddy said. "Well, whatever. Just give me that rope, you hold on to the raft, and I'll get ya all to where you ya wanna go, faster than you can say my name," Buddy instructed.

The water seemed to part as the raft moved with lightening speed across the top of the waves.

"Whew! Yo, Benjamin, ya gotta lose a few pounds, boy—I nearly busted a fin tuggin' your lard," Buddy said, out of breath as he rolled over on his back.

Buddy was still lying on his back when Porchia the Porpoise arrived.

"Oh no, just what I need. Porchia butting in!" Buddy said as he spit water up and into the air with his mouth. "Like I need this nosey porpoda busybody askin' so many questions—just makes me wana puke!" Buddy rambled on.

"Why hasn't anyone stuffed a shark in her mouth by now—doing us all a huge, huge favor?" he mumbled loudly.

"Hey there, Buddy—Whatcha doin'?" Porchia said affectionately. Buddy rolled over with disgust—"Gotta go, Benjamin. If ya need my help again, just give me a yell," he stated matter-of-factly.

Buddy was gone in a flash, with Porchia right behind him. "Wait for me, Buddy! Where are you going?" she yelled, pleading to him.

But Buddy, didn't slow down for a second. "I'm outta here, I'm outta here, I'm outta here, no question 'bout it, yep, no question 'bout it," he chanted, far out of Porchia's sight.

Benjamin swam right next to the raft and kept a close watch over the bahbies until nearly sunset. He was a kind, gentle giant of a water mammal; no one disliked him, and everyone trusted him.

He had always been kind to Porchia, just because everyone else couldn't stand her, especially Buddy. But Benjamin knew there was goodness in her—"Th—there is g—ga—good in ev—ev—everyone," he said to the bahbies, even though they didn't understand a word he said.

Benjamin had barely spoken the words when he saw Porchia returning. "Got a surprise for your little guys. You won't have to worry about a thing," she said.

"I asked the Ocean Cherubs if they could bring their bows and arrows and help you to protect Naddie and Neddie's bahbies. They didn't know what bahbies were until I explained it to them, and then they said they would help—for sure!" Porchia exclaimed.

Porchia rambled on. "There are four of them, one for each corner of the raft, north, south, east and west; they have got it covered. Now, anything else I can do for you this evening?" she asked Benjamin, as though he had actually asked her to do something in the first place.

"Why na—na—no Porchia, I c—c—can't think of a si—si—single thing," he said with a puzzled look on his face.

And with that, Porchia darted off talking. "I'm gonna go find Buddy and let him know he doesn't have to worry about you needing any help. I'll let him know I took care of everything…" She continued rambling on as she swam off in search of him.

"Oh na—na—na—! I'm ga—ga—gonna go t—t—to sleep, na—na—now. Di—di—don't want t—t—to hear it if sh—sh—she fi—fi—finds bi—bi—Buddy," Benjamin said as he dove to the bottom of the ocean and lay down on a bed of seaweed, with the raft anchored to his tail.

Just at sunrise, the morning of the twelfth day of their journey, Naddie and Neddie had returned to feed their bahbies. "Rest our little bahbies, your journey has nearly ended. Dream of us sometime, so we can say hello, again," they both said at the same time. Benjamin released the rope, and the raft drifted off.

The southern sun towering over the Sea of Nu beat brightly down upon them. The glass box, filled with the jewels that Lady Catherine had placed between their little bodies, glittered with the sun's reflection. The gem-stones had somehow absorbed the sunlight and its energy. It appeared as if the sun were following the boys on their journey—everything around them reflected its radiance.

A fortnight had passed before the vessel reached the dark side of the earth, and the babies' journey finally ended. The lily pad-covered raft glided toward the sandy beach, where it finally came to rest on the southern shore of Aura—home of the Muggles.

Chapter Three: The Arrival

The Muggles had been watching in awe. The enormous shaft of light seemed to glide across the ocean water. As it came closer, and closer, their darkened world was illuminated. No Muggle, from any village on Aura, knew what to think or how to feel.

The Muggles had lived in near darkness beneath a moon covered by a purple haze. They had never seen sunlight, or felt its warmth, and had no idea if this light was good or bad, happy or sad.

Many were horrified and frightened—running to find shelter for themselves and their children. Some Muggles were curious, but cautious. They stood behind trees, peeking their heads around the trunks of giant leafless redwoods to catch a glimpse of the mysterious light. Others hid behind and in large tumbleweed-looking bushes and shrubberies, too frightened even to scream. A few sought refuge in huge groundhog holes. And, those fortunate enough to have reached the shelter of their primitive tiny stone homes, barricaded the doors with anything they could find and huddled together with their families.

There was total silence and stillness on the continent of Aura, where it was normally noisy and active. The Muggles had hidden or disguised themselves so well that they couldn't be seen.

The mysterious light just kept coming closer, and closer, and closer. The closer it came, the warmer the air temperature became. It felt like the warmth of a burning fire against their cold blue skin.

This stream of white, yellow, orange, and red light was blindingly brilliant when it reached the white sandy beach of Aura.

Like magic, flowers burst into bloom, the tumbleweed shrubberies filled with bright green leaves, and orange honeysuckle blossoms dripped with nectar. The huge redwood branches spread out above them with a lush canopy of blue-green foliage.

Squirrels stuck their heads out of knotholes up and down the sides of magnolia trees, abundant with huge pink and white blossoms. Large friendly-looking groundhogs with long fluffy hair, each with a mouth full of bucked teeth, squeezed their heads out of holes side by side with Muggles, who had borrowed their homes for hiding places. Rabbits the size of large dogs hopped like kangaroos through the lush

grass, leaving trails behind them.

Giant bees jutted from place to place in gardens filled with blooms the size of dinner plates, attached to stems four and five feet tall. Peacocks strutted from behind boulders with Muggles seated on their backs.

One by one, the Muggles ventured out of their hiding places, gathering in groups on a hill just above the shoreline. At first they whispered to one another.

“What in tar-naaa-tion do ya suppose… what do ya suppose is goin’ on here, Golda?” Yur, the oldest Muggle on Aura, and the only Muggle who holds the title of Elder, nervously asked his wife.

Yur held on to Golda with one hand on her shoulder. His other hand grasped tightly around the carved handle of his wooden cane supporting his thin arthritic body, as she answered him. “Why, dear, the only thing I can think of is the sun,” she said to him with her hand cupped around his ear so he could hear what she was saying.

Golda, the oldest female Muggle on Aura and the only grandmother, is seventy-nine years old. Although she is slightly overweight with a plump belly, her short, round legs are very agile.

“You say the S.U.N.?” Yur questioned her.

“YES, DEAR, THAT’S WHAT I SAID,” she again yelled through her cupped hand and into his nearly deaf ear.

Yur is ninety-six years old, and although he is hard of hearing and his legs are bowed from arthritis, he can move fairly quickly when he wants to. There is certainly nothing wrong with his mind, but his hearing leaves a lot to be desired.

The Muggles waited for Yur to say something, anything, anything at all to them, but he hadn’t said a word—not a one to them, just to Golda.

“Golda, I’m gonna go down there and take a closer look for myself,” he said.

“Not without me you old fool,” she reprimanded him.

On the walk down the hill, Golda marveled at the flowers and greenery, occasionally stopping to smell gardenia blooms along the way.

“Would you hurry yourself, Goldy. If you wanna come with me then let’s get it movin’,” he scolded her as he shuffled down and through the tropical growth, using his cane to cut a path for both of them.

Grandpa Yur stood at the bottom of the hill, about twenty feet from the light source, waiting impatiently for Grandma Golda to finish her descent. “Goldy, hurry up. Would ya please hurry?” he nagged her.

“Oh, for goodness sake—have a little patience. I’m comin’ as fast as I can. Just hold on to your suspenders,” she said, knowing he couldn’t hear a word she said.

She reached her hand out and grabbed the end of his cane, which he had extended to help her maneuver the last few steps. Just as Golda was ready to step down and onto the beach, Yur, without thinking, turned around to look at the light, yanking the cane forward and pulling her down, face first, in the sand.

Golda looked up at her husband, and if looks could kill, he would have been dead right then and there. “What were you thinkin’, husband?” she said in a loud voice, but he never heard her.

Yur turned around again, leaned over her, and said, “Golda, what are ya doin’ layin’ there?”

“What do ya mean why—oh, never mind,” she responded as she stood up and briskly brushed the sand from her clothing.

As the other Muggles watched from above, Yur and Golda stepped into the light and seemed to disappear. All of the Muggles were worried as they watched and waited.

“I’m not going to just stand here and wait until something happens to my parents,” Harmon shouted to the others. “Anyone, comin’ with me?” He headed toward the beach with the other Muggles trailing right behind him, some of them pulling their shirts over their heads, and hats down over their eyes.

Just as Harmon, Golda, and Yur’s eldest son reached the bottom of the hill, his parents emerged from the light.

“You scared us all to death! What were you doin’?” Harmon asked his father.

“Well, we’re gonna need a little help down here,” Yur said as he put his arm over his son’s shoulder.

“What do ya need help with, Pop?” Harmon asked.

“The first thing we’ve gotta do is get the S.U.N. up to the Tower of Time,” he said with a definite command.

“Get the what to the Tower of Time?” Harmon questioned again.

“Son, this is no time to question my authority around here. I didn’t hear what ya said, but you’ve got that attitude. You and Pluck grab one of those baskets of yours and come with me!” he ordered.

The Tower of Time is a giant pyramid-shaped stone formation. The pyramid has a circular stone disk, with a half triangle stone mounted in its center, resting delicately on its tip. The tower juts toward the sky. The circular stone slowly turns counterclockwise during the day, casting moon shadows on the side of Mirror Mountain.

These moon shadows, and their position relative to the sphere of time, inform the Muggles of the time of day. It is located at the center of a cluster of caves on the north side of the village, at the base of Mirror Mountain.

Before long, Yur, Harmon, and Pluck walked into the light and seemed to disappear. Then suddenly the light appeared to float up and over the hill, through the village, down Pinker Path, to Rip Rap Road, until it reached the base of Mirror Mountain, finally resting atop the Tower of Time. The millions of tiny mirror-like marquisette rock formations glittered and gleamed, spreading light reflections all over the land.

Sunshine filled the entire sky above Aura, and Yur, Harmon, and Pluck reappeared at the top of the hill.

“How’d they get up there?” Stubby, a five-year-old Muggle boy who asks questions about everything he sees, asked Golda, as he pointed up to the top of the hill with one hand, and tugged on her sleeve with the other.

The Muggles were so fascinated with the sunrise they hadn’t noticed the tiny raft and its two tiny passengers.

Muggles laughed and cheered loudly. The noise awakened other animals. Birds flew overhead with low and graceful swoops, chirping songs of merriment.

Every Muggle celebrated. “Oh what a wonderful day this is!” they shouted. “We’ve got light! We’ve got light!”

Golda stood in front of them and clapped her hands together in an attempt to gain the Muggles' attention. "Listen! Listen! Listen! My little ones, you must listen to me," she pleaded, and they began to quiet.

"Did you hear that?" said Pitter to Patter, a twelve-year-old little girl and boy who love each other so very much they never stop holding hands.

"I did," responded Patter to her.

"That sounds like a baby crying, doesn't it?" Pitter exclaimed.

"That's what I've been trying to tell you all—Just turn around and look. Two babies arrived with the S—U—N," she said as they all ran toward the raft.

They could not believe their eyes! On a lily pad-covered raft were two babies. The twins looked very much like them, but were so much larger than normal Muggle babies.

"Who do these babies belong to, Grandma Golda?" Pitter asked her.

Everyone had so many questions. Some may never be answered, Golda thought to herself as she answered Pitter—"I don't know!"

Chapter Four: New Life on Aura

The Muggles moved cautiously toward the raft. Looking into the faces of the two innocent children, their fear seemed to vanish. Pitter and Patter stepped from the group and carefully lifted the babies from the raft covered with lily pads.

Until now, Pitter and Patter had always been seen holding hands. They loved each other so much that you could hear their hearts beating during silent moments, and see them thump, thump, thumping through their clothing. But today the twelve-year-old, freckled-faced couple held new lives in their arms.

Pitter snuggled one of the babies up against her pink-and-white gingham bodice and pulled her little white eyelet apron up and over the infant's back. Patter picked up the other baby and snuggled him behind his loosely fitting overalls bib. He took the bright yellow hanky that always hangs from his right pocket and wiped the sand from the baby's little cheeks.

Clutching the babies closely to their chests, Pitter and Patter carried the twins back to the village with nearly every one of the other Muggles following closely behind.

Forty-six-year-old Nona, Yur, and Golda's unmarried daughter, looked down at the babies over half-glasses that hung on the end of her nose. She seemed awkward and nervous. Nona's purple-and-yellow flowered housedress hung just above old leather work boots and her ankle socks when she asked Golda, "Where did these babies come from, Ma?"

"Nona, there was nothing with the children when they arrived here that gave us any information about these little fellows," Golda responded to her daughter.

Golda couldn't help thinking to herself that there must have been a very good reason why these tiny babies were separated from their parents, and she also knew those reasons may never be known. For now, the children needed their help.

"Although these babies are a bit different than Muggle babies, all babies need the same things—food, love, and a secure place to rest and grow. That is just what we will give them—until their mother arrives to take them home," Golda quietly said to Nona with doubt in

her voice.

Nona had never married, but she always had many Muggle children to love. “What are two more, Ma?” she said to Golda as she threw her hands in the air matter-of-factly.

“We do have a few problems to solve, Ma,” Nona continued.

“Well, dear, we will just have to solve each problem as it comes, one by one, won’t we?” Golda responded as she ran her short stubby fingers through the thick golden hair of one of the very large babies, still in the arms of Pitter.

The babies were very frail, and the Muggles didn’t know what they were to do with them.

Life on Aura had been simple and uncomplicated until the babies arrived. The Muggles never had any indication that there could be, or should be, any life beyond the shoreline of Aura to the south, Mirror Mountain to the north, Lemonade Lake and Fuzzy Forest to the east, and Volcano d’rue and the Pool of Pyro to the west.

Yur sat on his rocker made of bent tree branches and oak slats, rocking back and forth, back and forth. The front porch of this thatched-roof log home is where he and Golda spent most afternoons together. As he sits here now, Yur can’t help being in awe of the changes in the landscape. Everything around this old man has suddenly become new and filled with life.

He couldn’t hear what the Muggles were saying as they busily gathered supplies and began building a tree house next to his home. Nona had always dreamed of building a tree house. Now she would be living in her dream home with the twins.

Yur and Golda had always hoped that one day Nona would have children of her own, and now they saw the joy in her face when the Muggles bestowed upon her the guardianship of the babies.

“You’d better make sure that house is high enough—don’t forget about those darn “Greeblies,” Yur yelled to the Muggles from behind the wooden porch railing.

“Those blasted Greeblies—why I had almost forgotten about those little varmints. It’ll be even harder to spot those little buggers with all of this vegetation ‘round here,” he yelled.

Greeblies are fat ratlike rodents that live in Sticky Icky Swamp and often hide beneath boulders. They are nocturnal little pests with faces that resemble rabbits, and their large round ears curl slightly forward at the top. Their bodies are covered with gray coarse hair with black tips that look like they were dipped in ink.

Greeblies have short legs, but they can jump five feet in the air from a sitting position. Their long, coiled tails are used to quickly grab and snatch anything of interest to them, before being seen.

They have been known to grab hold of Muggle legs from behind and drag them frantically for yards and yards, before letting them go. Most often their goal is to steal food or raid the garbage.

Only two things frighten Greeblies: sand dogs called Nardles, and getting caught in a trap set by the Muggles—who would more than likely use them as dinner for their pet Nardles.

Nardles live in burrows along the shoreline, and Greeblies won't go near them. Even though the Greeblies are difficult to see, the Nardles can smell them a mile away.

With all of the excitement, the Muggles had not thought of the Greeblies until Grandpa Yur warned them. Although they had not seen or smelled one all day, they were sure it wouldn't be long before the little pests would be out and about, and causing trouble.

"Bluster," Golda's nephew, son of her youngest sister, Renona, is sixteen years old. A very insecure and boastful teenager, he felt a lot of resentment because his mother died when he was only seven, and his father died six months later from a broken heart.

He seemed to immediately identify with the twins. "We better get a Nardle or two and give them a new home—right here, and right here," Bluster said as he pointed to the exact spots he planned on building two sand dog boxes. Bluster headed off to the beach with two ropes in his hands.

The soft, silky, long beige hair of the Nardles dragged on the ground as Bluster pulled and tugged on the ropes he'd fastened around the necks of the friendly but hesitant sand dogs. Up and over the hill they went, and down Lemon Lane to the tree house.

"Come on! You're gonna love your new home, and the babies are gonna love you for keeping those pesky Greeblies away," Bluster said to the fluffy sand dogs, who are the size of lions.

Nearly every Muggle family was the proud owner of a Nardle or two. They were great protection and lovable companions for the children.

It wasn't long before the babies had been tucked into giant bird nest beds built by condors, and wrapped in blankets woven from cotton by expert Muggle weavers. The new home, twenty feet in the air, sprawled out between two enormous oak trees, with wooden spiral staircases that wound down the trunks of each tree. The staircase railings were wrapped with variegated ivy and blue and white flowering clematis.

Just as the sunset painted the ocean horizon with brilliant colors of pink, red, and pale gray, Yur sat on the porch with a feather pen in hand documenting the events of the last few days on the parchment pages of the Ancient Book of Tales. He titled his new entry "The Year of the S.U.N."

Golda sat next to her husband of fifty-five years on her matching rocker and nearly drifted off to sleep as she listened to her children and grandchildren singing the "Muggle-bye" from below the twins' new home. Although this song had been sung to many generations of Muggles, this evening it seemed to have an extra special meaning to everyone.

MUGGLE-BYE

Even though there's darkness all around,

This day's at an end,

and the night is your guide,

Drift away, drift away through the night,

Till you see the morning light.

Then look, look and you will see,

The world as you want it to be.

And open your heart to the day,

Till the night becomes the shade.

Rest now my child,

Rest your weary eyes,

Till you arise,

And meet the day,

Even though there's darkness all around,

There's nothing to fear,

a friend can be found,

And even in the darkest of nights,

There's a star that's shinning bright.

So close your eyes,

and rest them my sons,

This day's at an end,

and the night is your guide,

Drift away, drift away through the night,

'Til you arise to see the morning light.

See music score for "Muggle-bye" inside back cover.

Yur, looked at Golda struggling to keep her eyes open and smiled. "Well, Mother, do ya think it's time we put these ole bones to bed?" he asked.

"Well, Husband, that's one of the better ideas today," she said as she stood up and extended her hand to Yur.

"We've gotta take care of naming our new little fellows, Goldy—we can't keep callin' them babies," he said as he closed the front door behind them.

Chapter Five: What's in a Name?

With the sunrise came the excitement and anticipation of an event that would be taking place on Aura today. The Muggles had waited nearly three weeks to find out what names would be bestowed on the twins. Yur took his responsibilities as Elder very seriously. He had given the matter of the babies' names considerable thought, and was finally ready for his proclamations.

Muggle children are not always named at birth. Muggles believe that the characteristics of each child's name should tell something very special about that child. A symbolic name can result from an event, or a predestined personality trait, which means that some Muggle children wait for long periods of time before they are given a proper name.

One of the most honored and celebrated traditions of the Muggle community is the Ancient Ceremony of Names. It is held at a special location where lush forest-green ferns as tall as trees now fill the fields that surround a hot spring flowing from the middle of the earth. The vegetation keeps the ceremonial site hidden deep within Fuzzy Forest. Here, Muggle forefathers constructed a round pool with rocks and called it The Pool of Pyro. The Muggles followed Pinker Path, winding and turning and twisting through the forest, to the ceremonial place at the base of Volcano d'rue. In complete silence, the Muggles filed in two at a time, each one carrying a small bouquet of wild flowers in their tiny fists.

Boulder seats, topped with plush cushions made of golden-brown moss, completely encircle the pool. Here, Muggles took their assigned places to witness this most solemn event. The tiny stone seats were etched across the back with each Muggle's name.

Jutting from the southern side of the pool is a granite walkway. It leads to a platform that appears to be suspended in the center of the pool. Steam often rises from the bubbling water, but the temperature is just warm enough to be comfortable and soothing to the touch.

Golda, the last Muggle to arrive, carried both babies in her plump little arms. She struggled to keep the large babies on her full hips as she slowly stepped up onto the granite walkway, leading to the Naming Platform and to Yur, who had been the first to arrive.

Yur was sitting on an enormous white quartz armchair. It was carved with intricate designs from top to bottom, and the word Elder was spelled out in simple letters across the back. The throne was situated atop the circular platform in the center of the pool. He had a large leather-bound book in his gnarled hands.

Golda gently laid the babies on a bed of straw covered with swan feathers and lavender sachets, situated at the base of Yur's stone throne, just in front of three marble steps leading to Yur.

Yur folded open the leather-bound Ancient Book of Tales, laying it

across his lap, and began to read—

The Year of the Galaxies

“It was proclaimed in The Year of the Galaxies, that it is divine to love and be loved, and that everyone shall have a name to identify their place in the universe. The giving of a name is an honor but will not make one who receives it honorable.

Their chosen name will give them an identity to build upon. They will build character through experience, and gain or lose respect as a result of how well they handle those experiences.

If they have respect for themselves and others, they will have honor, and that honor will never, never deceive them.”

Golda picked up the twins one at a time and handed them to Yur. He looked intensely into the face of each boy for several moments. Yur saw something very special in the eyes of these children, and he wanted to give each of them a very distinctive name.

His mind began to wander as he thought about how they had come to Aura…

The magnificent arrival of the twins and the Golden Box of Light have brought wondrous gifts to all who live on Aura. Each glorious new morning the grass glistens with dew that looks like Stardust sprinkled across the landscape. Giant honeybee wings shimmer as they buzz from flower to flower, gathering nectar. Crystal-clear water ripples and sparkles as it rushes plentifully over clay river and stream beds.

On the beach, grains of sand twinkle like diamonds. Light splashes across the land, dabbing each flower with wet brilliant color. The Muggles have marveled at the splendor of each new day since the arrival of the twins.

Morning-glory blossoms open filling the air with sweet-smelling scents. Fluffy white clouds drift lazily about the bright blue sky. Squirrels chatter to each other as they scamper from tree to tree. Birds chirp joyfully as they hover overhead—all part of nature’s morning symphony—and all because the babies had come, Yur thought to himself as he held one of the boys in his hands.

Golda tapped his knee to awaken him from his daydream. Yur lifted the baby boy above his head, grasping him tightly under his frail little arms.

Golda took a soft sea sponge from her apron pocket. Her little legs folded at the knees, and her plump belly rested on her thighs as she bent over and dipped the sponge into the pool's warm bubbling water. She dabbed the moistened sponge into a clamshell bowl containing volcanic dust. The wet mixture formed reddish-black ink. Golda brushed the sponge filled with the ink mixture across the bottom of the baby's feet.

In a strong, proud voice Yur declared: "We have received the gift of sunlight. His name shall be "RAH," meaning light. May light always shine on him and on us, and may the light of Rah continue to bring us all joy as he grows and thrives on Aura."

Yur lowered the child until his inked little feet pressed firmly onto the open parchment page in the section titled "Record of Names." With Rah's footprints securely recorded for history, and a kiss on each of his rosy cheeks, Yur gently placed Rah back into Golda's arms.

Yur lifted the other boy with the same ceremonial tribute shown to Rah, and said: "Light has filled our flowers with beauty and life. His name shall be 'ZYN," meaning flower. May his days on Aura be filled with happiness and contentment." Yur sealed his pronouncement with Zyn's recorded footprints, then kissed each of his pale cheeks and placed Zyn into Golda's awaiting arms.

Yur closed the leather-bound Ancient Book of Tales. He stepped down from his throne and stood beside Golda, silently remembering how special it was when he and Golda named each of their children. He leaned forward and tenderly kissed her forehead.

Golda proudly carried the babies back down the walkway and handed them to Nona, who was awaiting their arrival. She laid them by the pool's side amidst a bed of brilliantly colored flowers made from the tiny bouquets the Muggles had brought for the occasion.

Yur, still standing on the platform, raised his huge gnarled hands toward the sky and addressed the silent Muggles: "From this day forward, let these children be loved by all who have witnessed this tribute!" The Muggles responded, "We will."

The tree-tall ferns surrounding the ceremonial site rustled like the wind was blowing through them, as one thousand and one white doves erupted from amidst the greenery, and the Ancient Ceremony of Names concluded.

Chapter Six: An Emergency Situation

Aura had changed over the past few months, and the Muggles' lives became filled with many new responsibilities.

Before the gift of sunlight spread over the land, food was very scarce and rationed at times. Now fruit abundantly hangs from the branches of trees and berry bushes. Gardens are rich with enormous vegetables, and corn and grain crops fill the farm fields.

Each Muggle assumed a position of responsibility to care for everything on Aura. Yur remained the Elder and guardian of the Ancient Book of Tales, and he set up a system based on historical records, designating categories of trade:

KEEPER OF THE LIGHT

KEEPER OF THE CHILDREN

KEEPER OF THE BEACHES

KEEPER OF THE VILLAGES

KEEPER OF THE AVIARY

KEEPER OF THE BEES

KEEPER OF THE ANIMALS

KEEPER OF THE GARDENS

KEEPER OF THE MILL

Everything cultivated or produced was shared by all of the Muggles. Mothers, fathers, and even children over the age of eleven worked. Pitter and Patter volunteered to care for and entertain Rah and Zyn during the day.

"I wonder why Rah and Zyn look so different now," Pitter said to Patter, as they played with the twins in Marigold Meadow."

"Yeah, they both had blonde hair and blue eyes, but Zyn has really changed. His hair is the color of rusty metal. He and Rah don't look like twins any longer. I thought twins always looked alike, don't they?" Patter asked.

Pitter looked at the children as they happily crawled and played in the tall, green, elephant grass. Zyn's bright green eyes sparkled like emeralds and his hair rustled in the breeze, as giant bright-orange, purple, and yellow swallowtail butterflies fluttered by him, just out of the reach of his little hands.

Rah crawled over to Pitter and sat up beside her. He tilted his tiny round head, and looked upward. His big violet-blue eyes were not only bright, they were full of curiosity.

"Well, at least they're easier to tell apart now!" Pitter said, as she gently ran her fingers through his soft, wavy golden hair. "Isn't their hair bee-you-ti-ful? It's like silk spun from the finest fibers!" she marveled.

"Yeah, it sure is," said Patter. "Hmm—I wonder what it's like to have hair?" he asked, rubbing the top of his smooth hairless head with his tiny hand.

"Oh! Oh! Now I remember!" Pitter exclaimed, interrupting Patter's thoughts.

"What? What are you talking about?" asked Patter. His brow was furrowed, his eyes widened with bewilderment, as he made his confusion known to Pitter and answered the question he thought she was asking him—"We never had hair!"

"Not that, silly!" Pitter said. "I think I know why the twins look different! I remember Grandpa Yur reading me a story from the Ancient Book of Tales. It was a story about twins who didn't look alike. I don't remember the word he used for them, but I do know there is one. He said the older they got, the more and more different they looked. Golda says that even though Rah and Zyn might look alike now, they may not always," she told Patter.

"That's right!" said Patter, raising his hand in the air and snapping his fingers. "I remember now, too!"

Zyn crawled across the meadow of tall green grass to Patter, and sat up next to him. Patter looked at Zyn's smiling, dimpled face.

"You know, Pitter," he said thoughtfully, "we can tell Rah and Zyn apart, but do you think they can tell you and me apart from everyone else? There are so many of us!"

"Sure they can. Muggles don't have twins, and we play with them

every day," she replied.

"Well, maybe you're right," said Patter thoughtfully. "Wonder why we don't have twins," he added.

"You ask too many questions, Patter. We don't have hair either, and nobody has an answer for that. That's just the way it is, I guess," Pitter answered him.

They stopped talking for a moment, and all that could be heard was the thump, thump, thumping of Pitter and Patter's little hearts.

Rah smiled, and looked into Pitter's eyes. "Pit-ter," he said. "Pat-ter," said Zyn. Both boys had grins that vividly displayed their two new front teeth protruding from their swollen red gums.

Pitter and Patter glared in astonishment at each other. Pitter tried to swallow her uncontrollable giggle, holding her hand to her mouth and pinching her lips together, as she turned her head away from the boys.

Patter was trying, but he wasn't hiding his laughter as well as Pitter. Patter's laughs turned into outright choking and coughing, forcing him to his knees in laughter.

Pitter grabbed Patter's arm and dragged him up and off the ground as she yelled, "We have to tell Grandma Golda they can talk! Right now, right now you silly goose! Right now!" she yelled and laughed at the same time.

They hurriedly put the babies back in their buggy. Patter wrapped his hands tightly around the bent, oak buggy handle and raced toward the village. Pitter was standing on the back of the buggy's wicker frame and holding onto the sun hood.

The babies' knuckles were turning blue as they held on tightly to the sides of the two-seater baby-mobile.

"Hold on, everybody!" Patter yelled, as the buggy bounced up and down, and up and down, and across stones, and up and over small hills along the pathway.

Patter ran through the village pushing the buggy so fast that not even the Greeblies could have grabbed them, so fast that Rah and Zyn's pet Nardles nearly passed out trying to keep up with them!

"We've got news! We've got news!" Pitter yelled.

“Yeah! We’ve got news!” Patter repeated. All through the village Muggles stopped what they were doing and quickly ran after Pitter and Patter. Breathlessly, Patter shoved the buggy the last few feet to Yur and Golda’s log home.

Muggles came from every direction and gathered in a crowd by the front porch. Patter nearly collapsed, gasping for breath as Golda wrapped her arms around his tiny shoulders.

“What’s all the fuss, children?” she asked. “Calm down. Tell me what is going on!”

Holding his hand against his chest and panting as he spoke breathlessly, Patter said, “Grandma—Oh, Grandma—they can talk!”

Before he could go on, Pitter jumped off the buggy and grabbed Rah. Holding him in her arms she said, “Who am I, baby?”

“Pit-ter,” said Rah.

Patter handed Zyn to Golda. He put his hands on his hips, pushed his chest outwardly, and said, “Go ahead, and ask him who I am.” As Golda looked at Zyn’s beautiful innocent face, he began to giggle. His two front teeth seemed so very large for his little mouth.

“Goldy,” Zyn said with a naughty giggle.

“Well, what do ya think of that?” Golda responded, as she gently pinched his cheek.

“Yippee!” cheered the Muggles.

“They can talk! They can really talk!” said Bumper as he bumped right into Golda. Bumper is a nine-year-old, very shy boy who blushes easily. He is always looking down at the ground, and is constantly bumping into other Muggles. Even when he speaks to someone he never looks up.

“Bumper, please dear, would you please lift your head up and watch what you are doing!” Golda reprimanded him, and his face turned scarlet red.

Bluster tugged on Golda’s sleeve. “Muggles can’t talk until they are six years old. How come these little guys can talk before they even walk?” he asked as he continued to tug on her sleeve while she was still speaking to Bumper. “Granma Goldy, can you tell me how this can

happen?" he asked.

"Grandma doesn't have all of the answers, children. Some things just can't be explained, and this is one of those things," she responded.

"But, there is one thing for sure—we've really got to get to work and teach them everything we know. They are very special children," Golda said as she walked back up the porch steps and sat down on her wooden rocker next to Yur, who was mumbling to himself.

Yur cupped his hands around his ear and leaned over toward Golda. "What in tar-nation is going on here?" Yur complained.

Golda yelled loudly in response. "The twins have spoken their first words and everyone is excited!"

His hand still at his ear he excitedly asked, "What's that you say Goldy? You say the bins have broken air by thirsty birds?"

Golda patted him on the hand, and said, "Never mind, dear! We'll talk about this later when some of this noise is gone."

Yur looked directly at her face, his frustration showing, and responded, "What's going on around here? We've got thirsty birds, and now—we've got blind deer?"

He rose to his feet with the help of his wooden cane. "Goldy," he pleaded, "go get my ear horn. I gotta get over there right now and see what needs to be done!"

Golda, with a perplexed look on her face, said lovingly, "I think getting your ear horn is a real—good—idea, dear!"

While Golda was in the house getting his primitive hearing aide, Yur was standing on the front porch yelling orders to the Muggles, who have now become very quiet, and confused.

"Go get the buckets! Fill'em with water! Get some warm cloths and aloe salve. This is an emergency!"

Yur continued shouting, and the Muggles just stared back with blank looks on their faces.

"Did you hear what I said? Now, get movin'—before anything else happens!" he exclaimed with a grumble.

With that, everyone scrambled, while Yur continued to bark

commands from behind the porch railing.

Pitter said to Patter, “What could he possibly want to use water and aloe for?”

“I don’t know! It must be some tradition—or something written in the Ancient Book. That’s all I can say,” replied Patter.

Bumper, tugging on Patter’s shirttail, said, “Boy, Grandpa Yur sure sounds mad. I didn’t know a talking baby was an emergency, but if he says so, it must be true. I guess we’d better hurry, ‘fore anything else happens!” And he hurried off to obediently follow Yur’s orders.

When Golda came back to the porch, she asked Yur, “What happened to everybody?”

Yur stomped his foot, looking at Golda, and said, “Am I the only one around here who knows when an emergency strikes, you don’t stand around chitchatting?”

Golda held the horn to Yur’s ear and shouted, “Did something bad happen while I was gone?”

“What in tar-nation are ya talkin’ about, Goldy? You’re the one who told me about the tragedy!” her husband shouted back.

“I did no such thing! You just didn’t hear what I was saying,” she corrected him.

“Well, Goldy,” he said with a stomp of his cane against the wooden flooring of the porch, “what were ya tryin’ to say?”

“I wasn’t trying to say what you thought I was trying to say. I did say the twins spoke their first words!” she responded with abruptness, Zyn still in her arms.

Golda handed Zyn to Yur as he rocked back and forth, and back and forth, with deliberate force-fulness, still mumbling and confused.

She huffed off the porch to where Rah was left sitting quietly in the buggy. Golda lifted him out and again took her place in the rocker next to Yur.

She picked up the ear horn and asked Yur, “Where is everyone, anyway?”

“Well, I think they might be busy,” Yur responded awkwardly.

“Just what do you mean? Busy doing what, Husband?”

“Well, you see, I gave them a few things to do. I guess they’re just busy taking care of a few things.” Yur told her, his eyes gazing into space, avoiding Golda’s stare.

Yur bent over, while still sitting in his rocker, and sat Zyn on the floor right in front of him. He then pushed himself to his feet and walked to the side of the porch with his back turned toward Golda, Zyn, and Rah.

He was pacing back and forth, his cane digging into the wooden porch floor, when Zyn noticed Pitter and Patter coming down the walkway carrying buckets, with Bumper very close behind them.

The buckets were heavy. The water splashed back and forth and slightly over the edges, as the children hurriedly walked. They kept switching from one hand to the other, struggling to reach Yur before all of the water had splashed to the ground.

Golda looked over the railing from her seat and asked, “Yur, why are those children bringing us water? We’ve got plenty of water in the rain barrels out back.”

“Well, Goldy,” he said, as he made a slow turn to face her with his chin pressed tightly to his chest, embarrassed, “—I kinda thought we’d need the water for the thirsty birds!”

Golda began to laugh loudly. “Oh dear!” she said. “Those poor children. Is there anything else I should know about, Yur?”

“Well, just one other little thing. I sent others to get some aloe salve,” he said in a childlike fashion.

“What would ya do that for, dear?” Golda quickly responded.

“I thought we may need that to soothe the eyes of the blind deer,” Yur mumbled as he stomped his foot on the porch.

Golda placed Rah on the floor next to Zyn and walked over to her husband’s side.

“Your heart was working just fine, my dear, it’s your ears that are in need of repair,” she said gently while handing Yur his ear horn.

Chapter Seven: A Special Place and the Stone

The Muggles watched the boys carefully when they were small, but Rah and Zyn became very independent as they grew and matured. The twins seemed to have a natural instinct for knowing what was dangerous and what was not. They developed an adventurous spirit that led them away from the security of the Muggles and their village.

Rah and Zyn took many walks in the forest and along the shoreline of Aura. The Muggles knew the twins could often be found strolling along one of the forest's many paths, or buried in a pile of the white sand that filled the beachfront.

It was a day of exploring for Rah and Zyn as they ventured off Pinker Path. They walked deeper and deeper into the forest, until they reached a clearing where a gigantic tree stood. How magnificent the great willow looked.

They had never seen anything like it before. Green, slender leaves attached to tentacle-like branches that cascaded to the ground made the tree look mysterious and frightening, yet, they weren't afraid.

Nearby, rainbow-colored snoutfish swam in a big lake filled with crystal-clear spring water. Snoutfish were given their name because they sometimes swim with their horn-shaped snouts sticking out of the water. When they eat, they suck-up their food like vacuum cleaners.

Rah and Zyn bent over the pond's edge and giggled as they watched the odd-looking creatures swim about, occasionally popping their snouts out of the water to investigate the boys' reflections.

Golda was here, but the boys didn't see her. She looked solemn, and her body was slightly bent over with age. Her belly was round and full, hidden by the white pinafore apron that draped over her shoulders.

This was her special place, the place where she would come to think. Golda's grandfather, Gab, had first brought her here many years ago when she was about eleven years old. Here he taught her to speak and understand languages, even the languages of the animals. No one else had known about this hideaway, until now.

"Rah! Zyn!" she called to the twins. "Come sit with me under my special tree!"

The boys were shocked to hear her voice, thinking they were alone. "Grandma, is that you?" Rah replied.

Her head popped out through the tree foliage. “It surely is!” she said matter-of-factly.

She parted the branches of the willow in an inviting manner. Rah and Zyn walked through the opening, closely behind Golda. As the branched doorway fell closed, the twins’ eyes opened widely.

“This is my secret place,” Golda explained. “Now you know where I am when I take those long walks! This place has always been my hideaway, and I hope you boys will keep it a secret for me. It’s good to have a special place to think, and to learn.”

“Oh! We won’t tell anyone, Goldy! We will keep your secret, honest! We won’t tell any Muggle at all!” responded the twins.

Golda explained how she had discovered this place when she was eleven years old, only a year younger than the boys were now.

“My grandfather brought me here, and when I first saw this tree, I thought it was the most magnificent thing I had ever seen. It was very frightening under the hazy purple sky above me, but my grandfather explained to me that this tree was a gift of nature. My curiosity ran away with my fear, and I just had to take a closer look.

“I remember walking around it, thinking there must be a rock in the middle, or something else very big, to hold up all of these branches. I just had to see for myself.

“When I pushed back the sparse foliage, I was shocked to find a huge tree trunk in the center of this arbor room. What a place to hide, I remember thinking to myself! No one would ever see me here—until now,” she smiled, as she shared her story with the boys.

“What are you reading, Grandma?” Rah asked.

“Well, I’m reading a story my mother read to me about her grandmother,” Golda replied.

“Can you read it to us?” Zyn asked her.

“I can’t see why not,” she said.

“We’ll sit right here. You won’t hear a peep out of us—until you are done, that is,” Rah promised.

Golda propped her back against the tree trunk, and opened the old

tattered canvas-covered book, and began to read:

THE FISHING HOLE

Perched high on a fence by a field of corn,

Ralphie the rooster doodle-dooed the morn,

As though he were proud

a new day was born.

I pulled up the covers clear over my head,

Still smelling honeysuckle next to the shed,

And heard Granny get up and out of her bed.

Mornings with Grandma

were fresh and bright,

Her cheeks shine like cherries in the sunlight,

Her hair done up neatly in a bun of white,

Her striped dress was covered

by an apron she wore.

She enjoyed every task,

nothing seemed like a chore,

And you could tell,

she had done them many times before.

Cluster of brown and white eggs did lay,

‘Neath the hens in the coop, on nests of hay,

‘Til we gathered them up,

as she did every day;

Putting them in a basket woven of vines,

Where grapes of dark purple

still hung in our minds,

On the arbor in the yard

where I liked to climb.

The chickens all scattered

as she tossed the feed;

We went on to the garden

where we'd pick and weed,

Soon it was dough

for the bread she would knead,

And all before breakfast, how did she do it?

With a smile on her face

and a great sense of wit,

Nothing upset her, not one little bit.

She understood

everything there was to know,

Even 'bout Ellen the deer, and her baby doe,

And Alice and Andy, two big black crows,

A horse named Peanut,

and a mule called Bopper,

Piglets known as Dotty, Frank, and Mopper;

All had a name, it only seemed proper.

"I think we'll get dressed for a hike," she said,

And from the closet, took boots of bright red,

And fishing rods

from a box she kept under her bed.

“I know a place where we can have fun,

We’ll pack a picnic lunch,

and hide from the sun.”

And before I could catch my breath,

the trip had begun—

Up and over small hills, and in between trees,

Mud soon spattered clear up to our knees.

We passed by a meadow

filled with flowers and bees,

Then arrived at a path, that led up the side

Of a mountain she spoke of,

where we’d hide.

She said, “This trip gets harder each year,

I confide!”

We walked ‘til we came to a great waterfall,

And enjoyed our picnic lunch

‘neath a tree, oh so tall,

As the water whished over

the high stone wall,

It crackled and splashed as it hit the bottom;

Granny said

it’s even more beautiful in autumn,

And then whispered—

she had almost forgotten.

And now we stand ‘neath a canopy of green,

That soon will change to a colorful scene,

With reds, yellows, oranges, and in-betweens.

Until the brisk, cold winter winds blow,

And blankets the ground

with clean, white snow,

Like an extra special holiday show.

Everything was exciting

through Granny’s eyes,

Even the simplest of things

held a big surprise;

She said there were lessons to learn,

for the wise,

Then pointed to a squirrel, as it ran up a tree,

Carrying a nut in his mouth,

it seemed funny to me,

But this winter it would warm him,

like a cup of hot tea.

Look over there, at the pheasant on her nest,

I thought she was there just to take a rest,

Dressed in shades of brown,

her afternoon best,

But she was a mother, on a precious egg,

Like the chickens

Granny kept in a wooden shed,

Until baby is born, she'll lay atop the bed.

Granny had a special way with words,

Like water from the talking brooks we heard,

Or the magical music of the treetop birds.

Her stories were like presents,

with big bright bows,

That filled me with happiness,

right down to my toes,

And taught me everything,

she thought I should know.

Next to a rock by the water,

stood a tree of oak

That gracefully spread under the sun,

like a cloak,

Where I sat by Granny,

all the while she spoke,

And listened very carefully,

to every word she said,

As she told me stories of her mom

and Uncle Fred;

Her memories were clear,

like stories from a book she had read.

My mom, and her brother, and sister June,

Once found a rabbit,

and they named her Moon.

Tired and hungry,

they fed her from a spoon,

She soon ate lettuce, ‘til she wanted no more.

There was hay in her box,

but no sign of a door,

And that box sat proudly

on their bedroom floor.

This new friend of theirs was truly a treasure,

And caring for her each day

was simply a pleasure.

Memories like these, surely lasting forever,

Like the morning Granny was amused to find

She had come into the room, and just in time,

To see Mom next to Moon,

reading nursery rhymes.

Granny had room

in her heart, mind, and house,

For a tattered and torn rag doll named Clouse,

Old picnic baskets, and yes—even a mouse.

All living things need a home;

it only seems fair,

Animals of all shapes and sizes

were everywhere,

Horses, chickens, geese,

a mule, a dog, and a hare.

She saved everything over these years,

Keepsakes hold stories,

memories that are dear,

For Granny and me

they seem so real and near;

She taught me everything

she knew of the past,

Gave me memories to last, and last, and last,

And a fishing rod she would teach me to cast.

Pages are now being filled,

just like in a picture book,

All seemed more important,

with every single look;

Memories built with simple love,

was all it ever took.

The days I've shared with Granny,

have given me a glance

Of the past, and even the future, as we watched

the water dance;

Swirling ‘round and ‘round,

‘til it nearly put us in a trance.

Granny said, “We’ve had enough of a rest.”

With that we stood, and took a stretch,

“We still haven’t done the thing I like best.”

She looked into my eyes,

and pinched my red nose,

“Im so glad I had a chance

to see you grow!”

Her love for me was unlike any other I know.

Water swished ‘round our feet

as we stepped into the mud bowl,

String woven in, and out, through tiny hoops

to the top, laced our fishing poles.

With a snap of the wrists,

lines flew over our heads,

and into the fishing hole—

And so it came to pass, that each day Golda and the twins met under the big old tree. There, Rah and Zyn sat with her as she taught them many wondrous things about the plants and animals living in the forest, and read them stories she enjoyed as a child.

“I don’t have a fancy fishing rod, boys, but I would be happy to teach you what I know about those crazy little Snoutfish,” she invited.

The boys wanted to learn the language of the Snoutfish, so Golda led them to the edge of Lemonade Lake. “Put your ear against the water,” she said, “and listen. You will be able to hear the Snoutfish talking.”

Lying on the ground, their heads turned to the side, their long silky hair cascading on the water’s surface, Rah and Zyn listened. At first,

all they could hear was the water lapping at the lake's edge. Then, as they listened more closely, they heard what seemed like soft breathing sounds.

Zyn sat up. "Grandma, I don't hear the Snoutfish talking, but I do hear the Snoutfish breathing," he said.

"You must be patient, Zyn," Golda replied. "Listen a little bit longer. The Snoutfish are just trying your patience."

Zyn placed his ear against the water a second time. Once again he heard them take a breath. He waited, and waited, and waited. Just as he was about to give up, he heard noises that sounded like voices, soft alto-toned, watery voices. He listened for a few minutes longer, and then both he and Rah sat up and looked at each other.

"I heard them!" Zyn shouted, frightening several of the Snoutfish.

They dove straight to the bottom, never stopping to take another breath of air from just above the water's surface.

"The Snouts told me they were hungry!" Rah said, very excited.

Zyn looked at him, perplexed. "I heard them talking, but I couldn't understand a thing they said! How could you understand what they were saying, Rah?" Zyn asked doubtingly with his hands on his hips.

Rah put his arm around his brother's shoulder and said, "Listen again with me, Zyn. They use symbolic sounds. Do you hear that?" he asked, as he leaned over the water next to his brother.

"The rhythm they use to sing their messages tells you what they mean. It's like the notes you hear when Fife, the village Muggle musician, plays his saxophone," Rah explained.

Golda, smiling as she watched the boys interact with each other, sensed something she had never noticed before. Zyn seems to be a bit insecure in the presence of his brother.

"Well, if they are hungry, then I guess we had better find them some food!" Golda interrupted Rah.

Zyn jumped up right away and said, "I saw some budding plants over there by that big rock!" as he pointed with authority.

"All right, Zyn, let's go see what you have discovered," Golda

responded joyfully.

“You just wait right here, Rah. We’ll be right back with the food,” Zyn told his brother as he walked away with Golda.

Lemonade Lake is located at the base of a huge pile of boulders. A natural spring juts out from an opening situated at the base of the pile. Water flows plentifully from the spring’s opening and falls into the lake. Golda bent down next to the lake and dipped her cupped hand into the cold water, and took a drink.

“Zyn, take a drink of water from the lake,” she said invitingly. Zyn, knelt down right beside Golda and dipped his cupped hands into the water, and then lifted them to his mouth.

“Hey! This water tastes like lemonade,” he said with great surprise.

“Now you know why they call it Lemonade Lake,” Golda replied.

“Why, that is the strangest thing I learned about today,” Zyn told her.

Golda bent down once again and stuck her hand in the water. Reaching just under the spring, she picked up a small stone. It was colorful and had a smooth, indented center.

“The water must have dripped against its surface for many, many years to create such a beautiful design,” she told Zyn.

Golda took Zyn’s hand in hers. Turning his palm upward, she placed the stone in the center of his tiny, soft hand, and closed his fingers around it.

“Rub your thumb in the center; feel how smooth it is. These stones are very rare and have special powers. You should treasure it always, she told Zyn.

“When you are worried about something, anything, just rub it, and you will be reminded of how much you are loved. The Ancient Book of Tales tells us that soldiers carried these ‘worry stones’ with them into battle because they had extraordinary magical powers.

The power of this stone allows it to solve any problem. You just have to be pure of heart when you use it, and if you are, your wishes will be granted,” Golda explained.

Zyn knew that Rah was not given a stone, and he wanted it that way

—a secret only he shared with Golda. “I will keep this with me always, Grandma!” he promised.

“What kind of a plant is this, Goldy?” Zyn asked as he bent down and plucked a sprig from the leafy green foliage he had seen earlier.

“It is called ‘Sorrel’. The seeds underneath the leaves will make fine food for the fish. Let’s gather some, and you and Rah can scatter them across the top of the water before we leave,” Golda suggested.

As they scattered the tiny brown seeds, Golda told them that every plant growing in the soil of Aura had a significant meaning. “Sorrel means affection. Just as the willow tree signifies wisdom,” she explained.

On the way home they passed by the gardens. Huge purple clusters of grapes hung heavily from slender spiral vines. Wisps of silk blew gently in the breeze from atop plump ears of corn, wrapped tightly in green husks. Juicy golden pears and velvet-red apples hung from trees like ornaments.

“Pick,” Pluck’s wife, was so busy harnessing a giant horse ant, she didn’t see the boys as they passed by her. Neither did Pluck, who was positioned at the top of a cherry tree busily examining the leaves for fruit worms.

Actavia, a Keeper of the Gardens, like her mother and father, Pick and Pluck, was scattering seeds along neatly plowed rows. Other Muggles, were carrying water in acorn buckets to flower gardens in need of it.

Rah and Zyn had not walked for more than ten minutes before they heard crying. Rounding the bend, by a meadow of giant wild flowers and bees, they found Bumper rubbing his eyes and sobbing loudly.

Chapter Eight: Doctor! Doctor!

Bumper, his arms bent at the elbows with his tiny clenched fist supporting his chin, was sobbing uncontrollably when Rah and Zyn approached.

“Bumper, why are you crying?” asked Zyn, as he knelt down in front of the tree stump where he sat.

“It’s my lovebirds, Mick and May—my—my lovebirds are gone! They flew away—and I don’t know where they have gone!” he cried out to the boys with a shaky voice.

Bumper continued sobbing, and Rah and Zyn could barely understand a word he said, with the way his little voice was quivering as he continued to speak.

“Wuskers, that big old dumb cat jumped right out—from behind that Fire Bush—right over there,” Bumper said as he pointed and cried. “He scared them so badly, they flew away! He just kept right on chasing them. By now, they probably flew off to the moon!”

“I think I know where they might be hiding, lil’ guy! Don’t worry, I’ll find your pets!” Rah told him.

Bumper jumped off the stump rubbing the tears from his eyes. The broad swipes of his open dirty hands left mud smears on his pudgy cheeks. “Let’s go!” he said.

“No, Bumper, I think it is best that you just stay right here, and calm down!” Zyn said, with his head tilted toward his shoulder and one hand on his hip.

Rah set out in search of the missing lovebirds, while Zyn stayed behind to soothe the panicked Muggle.

The tall evergreens reached nearly one hundred and fifty feet in the air. Rah, now a strapping young man, felt so insignificant in their presence. The grove was carpeted with a thick cushion of brown pine needles, decorated with huge pinecones scattered throughout.

Midway down the path, Wuskers, a very plump, chartreuse and white-striped cat, came slithering up next to Rah. He rubbed his head across Rah’s long legs, weaving in and out, just above his ankles. “Wuskers, what have you been up to again? You silly cat,” Rah said reaching down, and picking him up at the nape of his neck by the loose skin.

Rah held him under his front legs as he stared directly into the cat’s naughty eyes. Wuskers had a big grin on his face. His eyes rolled upwardly as Rah struggled not to laugh when he scolded the free-spirited animal.

“Don’t you ever do that again to Bumper! Or I will—or I will—Oh, never mind! You’re too naughty, you little brat!” Rah said in frustration, nearly bursting into laughter as he set him down and Wuskers ran off.

Just above Rah’s head he heard a rustling sound. Looking up, he saw two birds with green bodies and blue and yellow heads huddled

tightly together in the treetop. They were trembling with fright.

“Come! Come to Rah,” he said with his arm extended upward. “Wuskers, that big old cat, is gone. You’ll be all right!” Rah assured them.

In a flutter the birds came to rest on Rah’s broad shoulders. There they remained until they spotted Bumper, patiently waiting by the meadow.

Bumper’s big brown eyes gleamed, and a wide grin spread across his small, innocent, blushing face. He ran to Rah and wrapped his arms around his legs, his head resting just above Rah’s knees. The lovebirds jumped from Rah’s shoulder and sat on Bumper’s.

The Muggles were busy playing croquet when Bumper arrived back in the North Village with his lovebirds on his shoulder.

“Hey, everybody, can I play?” Bumper asked, as he tugged on Bluster’s shirttail.

“Just hold on Bumper, it’s my turn, and I’m gonna get my ball through that hoop this time. Just watch me, Bumper—you’ll learn a few tricks,” Bluster boasted as he used his elbow to shove the other Muggles out of the way.

“WHACK”—his tree branch-handled mallet hit one of the clay balls. The ball flew into the air like it had been shot from a cannon, higher and higher and higher—until it finally landed in an empty bird nest on top of a giant maple tree.

Just as Bluster started to explain how powerful his swing was, a blue jay flew over the nest, saw what she thought was an egg, and sat on top of the ball. Bluster was speechless. His mouth dropped open with shock. His eyes widened in amazement, and hysterical laughter broke out among the other Muggles.

They were all laughing so hard their sides ached and tears streamed down their faces. A few of the Muggles rolled on the ground, holding their pudgy little bellies and laughing out of control.

“You’re playing croquet, not golf!” choked Bumper, who was holding his hand on his mouth trying to hold back his laughter.

“Maybe I should play volleyball instead!” Bluster replied, laughing at himself.

“Hey, Rah, maybe that’s why this croquet course is called Mad Muggles,” Zyn said to his brother, laughing, just as Rah was about to hit his ball through the first set of hoops.

“No fair making me laugh,” Rah retorted as he slammed his mallet against his croquet ball.

Zyn stood there laughing as he watched his brother’s ball dart off to the left, completely missing the first set of hoops. “Amazing—the mighty Rah—fails,” Zyn yelled out to everyone, as he threw his hands in the air.

“Nice—really nice—what a brother you are, Zyn.” Rah responds with a slap to his brother’s back, and Zyn choked on his laugh.

“Oh, what’s the matter, Rah? Can’t stand a wittle, wittle failure, can ya?” Zyn chided him.

“I never said I couldn’t take failure. I just like to play a game fairly,” Rah said.

Zyn just wouldn’t give up teasing his brother. The entire time they played the game, Zyn did everything he could to distract Rah.

Rah did his best to ignore his brother, and by the time he reached the most difficult set of hoops in the game, Mad Mad Muggle Circle, he had totally blocked Zyn and his antics from his mind.

The mallet swung up and over Rah’s head, and down, hitting the ball perfectly through the hoops of Mad Mad Muggle Circle with only one shot. No one had ever been able to do this, except Yur. He had held the championship title, and worn the gold medallion since he was nineteen years old.

The Muggles gathered around Rah congratulating him. Zyn stood in the background and watched as Yur took the heavy golden medallion from his neck and placed it in Rah’s hand.

“Rah, congratulations. I’m so proud of you!” Yur said sincerely. With that, Zyn just turned and walked away, in silence.

Zyn’s disappointment did not go unnoticed by Yur. That evening he sat with him alone on the front porch of Yur’s home,

and read to him from the Ancient Book of Tales.

And so it came to pass in…

The year of the Gilded Cages

Many, many, years ago, long before the wars, a band of pirates had taken refuge in the caves along the shoreline of Aura. A storm had driven them here, and when it subsided they could see another pirate ship approaching. The pirates had no time to spare as they departed. They left behind animals and birds that were not native to Aura.

Ferrets, lovebirds, and parrots were left behind in gold, gilded cages with pearl-handled doors. The exotic fowl and mammals were originally captured by traders in a place called Copia and were intended as pets for royalty. The pirates had robbed a cargo ship headed for the English colonies and had taken the birds and two hundred pounds of gold in chests.

It has been recorded that the pirates were not interested in what was inside the cages, but rather the gold from which they were constructed.

“The pirates and their misfortunes have given us some of the animals we enjoy every day,” Yur explained to Zyn. “They wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for the storm that washed the pirates ashore that night.”

Zyn was fascinated by the story and wondered if the pirates had left anything else behind. That night, before he went to sleep, he told Rah all about the stories he had been told.

“Do you think there are treasures still buried?” Rah asked Zyn.

“Only one way to find out,” Zyn answered.

In the morning, Rah and Zyn set out to explore the caves along the shoreline, and daydreamed about finding hidden treasures.

They walked down the sandy coast, looking up at the cliffs along the way. It was nearly dawn when Zyn spotted a small opening in the middle of a patch of overgrowth, about eight feet up on the side of Limestone Cliff.

The boys wrapped their hands around a thick monkey vine that was attached to a tree at the top of the cliff. They pulled themselves up and onto a ledge situated right under the overgrowth.

Rah and Zyn pulled away the wild vegetation, ripping and tearing it

out by the roots. They tossed the weeds over the side of the cliff and watched as they fell into the ocean. The water was lapping fiercely against the shoreline below them as they worked. Before long, the stone doorway was clearly visible.

Grabbing the side of the stone opening, they leaned their heads forward and into the dark cave. There was just enough light to see bamboo torches that must have been left behind by previous visitors. Zyn reached into the spider-infested webs, and wrapped both of his muscular hands around the torches, removing the torches from the dirt floor.

Rah placed some dried grass on top of a rock and laid the tips of the torches down next to it. He took two phosphorous rocks and struck them together to make enough sparks to ignite the grass. With only a couple of strikes, the grass began to smoke. Rah and Zyn gently blew on the grass until it and the tops of the torches were fully engulfed in flames.

The cave was very dark inside until Rah and Zyn entered with the dusty, old, bamboo torches. The opening was covered with cobwebs and years of dust and dirt, but the farther they walked inside, the more and more intrigued they became.

The boys traveled through long corridors, winding around and around. They marked the direction they went every few feet with an X on the walls along the way. Rah and Zyn walked farther and farther into the cave's passageways.

Rah was becoming more and more frightened with every step they took. The floors became wet and slippery, and they began to slip and slide, almost unable to keep their footing.

"This is too scary for me, Zyn. We should get out of here," Rah said to his brother.

"I'm not going anywhere until I see if there is a treasure hidden in here," Zyn shouted back.

At the end of the passageway, there was a small room with a pile of rocks stacked right up to the ceiling on one side.

"I bet that's another opening behind those rocks," Zyn said to Rah, as he began pulling rocks from the pile that blocked them from going any farther into the cave."Shh. Did you hear that, Rah?" Zyn asked him.

“Yeah, that sounds like music. Who could possibly be in this cave?” Rah asked his brother.

“I have no idea, but I’m gonna find out, that’s for sure,” he answered Rah, as he climbed to the top of the pile.

“Don’t go up there, Zyn. I’m frightened. Let’s just get out of here,” Rah begged his brother.

“I’m just fine. Don’t spoil the fun like you always do, Rah,” Zyn said as he threw a rock off the top of the pile, barely missing Rah’s head.

“If you don’t wanna help me, how about you hold those torches higher so I can see what I am doing,” Zyn grumbled as he kept throwing rocks down and over the pile.

It wasn’t long before Zyn had made a hole large enough to look through at the top of the rock pile. He slid one of the torches through the narrow opening he had made and stuck his head in to take a look. “Wait until you see this!” Zyn yelled to Rah.

The music seemed louder than it was before, and Rah couldn’t see what his brother was doing. Lying on his belly, Zyn crawled through the opening and disappeared from Rah’s sight.

“Some of us have it, and some us don’t,” Rah heard his brother say from the other side of the rock pile.

Zyn got his first glimpse of the huge, cavernous room hidden by the rock pile, and what he saw totally entranced him.

“Yeah, he got the last part of that statement right,” Rah mumbled as he crawled up to the top of the pile.

Just as Rah reached the opening, Zyn stuck his head back out of the hole and yelled at Rah. “Come on! What are you waiting for? I’m not gonna wait all day for you,” Zyn threatened his brother.

“I guess I had better go with you, so you don’t get into any trouble,” Rah said as he began to slide in through the opening.

The music they heard was coming from what looked like a monstrous pipe organ at the opposite side of the room. Actually, it was a rock formation made from many stalagmites of different sizes. Long, slender stalactites hung from the ceiling, where water dripped for hundreds of years from their pointed tips. Stalagmites rose from the

wet floor, forming many different shapes as well.

Light was streaming in at spots, creating the impression of candlelight. Rah and Zyn realized that the breeze they felt in here was coming from the openings where the light entered.

Above their heads were five cracks in the cavern ceiling. When the wind blew in and across the “pipes” of the “organ,” it sounded like musical notes being played. The music echoed in the room, repeating over and over again.

Rah and Zyn, their eyes wide with excitement, looked around the cavern. “Hey! Look over there, Rah,” Zyn said as he pointed to six boulders arranged in a circle, in the center of the massive room.

“Let’s take a look,” Rah said and ran toward them.

“Wait a minute, this is my treasure hunt,” Zyn yelled at Rah as he grabbed his shoulder.

Zyn pushed himself in front of his brother and ran forward.

“Do you see what I see?” Zyn asked Rah as they stood on top of one of the boulders.

“Looks like an old wooden box to me,” Rah said with little enthusiasm.

“That is no wooden box. That’s my treasure,” Zyn said.

“What makes you think this is your treasure?” Rah asked him as they stood in front of the dirty old wooden chest.

“It’s mine because I found it first,” Zyn told his brother in no uncertain terms.

“Well, I don’t think we should touch it. It probably belongs to someone,” Rah said.

“Yeah, you’re right. It belongs to me,” Zyn responded as he bent down and brushed some of the dirt off the top.

“I told you—I told you—I knew we would find a treasure,” Zyn said, clapping the dirt from his hands.

“Oh, now it’s we—we who found the treasure,” Rah lashed back at him.

“Okay, it’s me—me who found the treasure,” Zyn retorted, looking straight up into his brother’s eyes.

Zyn brushed more dirt and dust from the top of the wooden chest and found a gold circular emblem embedded in the heavy wooden top. The emblem had spiral designs along the outside edge of the circle, and two crossed swords behind a dove in the center.

Zyn had seen this gold emblem before—many times before. “Rah, look at this. Does it look familiar to you?” he asked.

Rah bent down beside his brother to take a closer look. “I can’t believe it!” he exclaimed, as he slipped the gold medallion from around his neck and laid it next to the one on the old wooden chest.

“Grandpa Yur told us he didn’t know where the medallion had come from,” Rah said to Zyn.

“Well, maybe he didn’t know where it came from, since he was only a boy when he won it. But I know where it came from now,” Zyn boasted, “and we’re not going to tell anyone about this. Do you hear me, Rah?”

“Why not?” Rah asked.

“Very simple, Brother, it’s my treasure, you said so yourself, and I don’t want anyone to know. It’s as simple as that.”

Rah walked away from his brother, very disappointed. He felt like he was losing the closeness he and Zyn had always shared.

Rah stepped up and onto a ledge behind the giant “pipe organ,” while Zyn worked at opening the old iron lock on the front of the chest.

Zyn’s head was filled with thoughts of the hundreds of gold medallions and giant pearls that must be inside his treasure chest.

“I’ve gotta get this lock off, or I won’t be able to get this blasted thing open, Rah. Can you help me?” Zyn yelled to his brother, but he didn’t get an answer.

“All right, I know you’re mad at me, but I really, really, really need your help. I’m sorry—okay? I’m really sorry. Now, will you please help me?” Zyn continued shouting and pleading, but still no answer.

Now Zyn was worried. He looked all around the cavern and didn’t see

anything at first, until he stepped up and onto the ledge. He saw Rah's legs protruding from behind the stalagmites.

He ran over to his brother.

"Rah! Wake up! Wake up! This is not funny, not one little bit!" Zyn shouted as he bent down beside his brother and began to shake him.

"What's wrong? Say something, please say something," Zyn cried.

When nothing worked, Zyn ran as fast as he could, past his priceless treasure chest, and suddenly he stopped and turned back. Frantically Zyn piled rocks around and on top of the wooden box, hiding it from sight, before he continued up and over the rock pile, sliding back through the hole, down the other side of the rock pile, down and around and around, and through the cave's passageways, out to the ledge, climbing up the monkey vine—he continued on, running as fast as he could toward the village to get help.

As fast as Zyn ran, he wasn't fast enough to keep Greeblies from latching onto him along the way. But not even Greeblies would stop him—he just kept kicking and shaking them off as he ran.

He thought for just a few seconds about Broozer, his pet Nardle he had decided not to take with him this morning, as he kicked a huge Greeblie straight up and into the air like a football.

"Dr. Dibbs! Dr. Dibbs!" Zyn yelled as he approached the doctor's cottage at the edge of South Village.

"Who's calling me?" Dr. Dibbs shouted as he opened his front door.

"Dr. Dibbs, I need your help, I mean Rah needs your help! Right away —I don't have time to explain," Zyn shouted, almost screaming.

"Well, okay, just let me get my bag," Dr. Dibbs replied.

In seconds, Dr. Dibbs returned with everything he needed in his bag.

Zyn was standing right next to Dr. Dibbs's front door biting his nails. "Can we take Medimut with us?" he asked, referring to the doctor's Nardle. It will help us save some time."

"Well, sure, just untie him—he'll follow us, Zyn," Dr. Dibbs said.

Zyn bent down, took Dr. Dibbs's bag, and told him to hop on his back and hold on to his neck.

Zyn took off running as fast as he could, back to the cave. The Nardle ran right behind him. Dr. Dibbs was nearly choking him to death, as he held on to Zyn's neck and bounced up and down with every one of his strides.

"What were you boys doing in here?" Dr. Dibbs asked Zyn as he squeezed through the cavern opening.

Zyn stuck his hands back through the hole and grabbed on to Dr. Dibbs, pulling him into the cavern with one tug.

"We were looking for things, but we didn't find anything," Zyn told him.

"Oh, yes you did, Zyn. You found trouble, that's what you found," Dr. Dibbs said as he crawled up and onto the ledge.

Zyn stood behind Dr. Dibbs nervously chewing his fingernails. "Honest, Doc, I didn't do anything wrong," Zyn explained. "What's wrong with him? Will he be all right? Oh, please, please tell me he will be all right!" he pleaded.

"I'm sure he will, Zyn, as soon as we get him out of this moss. I believe that Rah is allergic to it. Come on, help me move him!" Dr. Dibbs ordered.

Within minutes of being removed from the moss, Rah awakened from his deep, deep sleep.

"You called that moss. What moss?" Zyn inquired.

"It's actually Bordonian Moss. I know it by its lime green and purple tipped curly flowers," Dr. Dibbs replied. He continued. "It was once used by the Indians to make a medicine that helped people sleep when they were in pain.

"Sometimes it worked and other times it didn't, so they stopped using it because they just couldn't trust it. It seems the moss would decide who would sleep and who wouldn't. You just have to touch it to know if you will be affected.

"You must be careful when you play, Zyn, you could get into serious trouble in the wrong places," Dr. Dibbs warned him.

Zyn, still biting his nails said, "I guess it doesn't bother me, right? I stood there the whole time and nothing happened to me. But, boy it

sure put you off in dreamland, Rah!" Zyn said matter-of-factly as Rah regained consciousness."

Dr. Dibbs looked seriously at Zyn and said, "I think it would be a good idea if you boys stayed away from caves! The moss may not have an effect on you, Zyn, but to Rah, it's a poisonous spore that will put him to sleep, maybe forever."

Rah, still weak and dizzy from his experience, whispered disappointedly to Zyn, "I guess I spoiled your treasure hunt, didn't I?"

"That's okay, I can come back here one day and find out what's in there, you know, the chest," Zyn whispered to Rah as they left the cave and headed back to the village, with Dr. Dibbs sitting on top of his Nardle, in front of the boys.

Chapter Nine: An Attitude

The Muggles had shared their knowledge with the twins, and over the years Rah and Zyn were good students.

Yur noticed when the boys were very small that they possessed unexplainable abilities and intuition most Muggle adults don't have. He spent many, many hours reading to the boys from the Ancient Book of Tales, teaching them about the history of the Muggles and the moral lessons derived from that history.

Rah made use of his knowledge by making many contributions to the community. His wisdom and kindness earned him the respect of the Muggles, and Rah admired them for their hard work and ethics. He was constantly searching for ideas that would improve life for everyone on Aura.

Rah watched the Muggles irrigate their gardens by painstakingly carrying giant acorn buckets of water from creeks and streams. He thought about finding a solution to the irrigation problem for several years, and he finally developed a design to simplify the process of delivering water to the gardens and villages.

Under Rah's direction, the Muggles built a three-story, ironstone Mill House next to Crystal Creek, on the southwest side of Aura. The Mill House has three main purposes—water distribution, food processing, and housing for Rah and Zyn.

The first floor is used to process wheat and grain. The mechanical parts of the mill are located on the second floor. The third floor is Rah and Zyn's new home.

On the waterside of the Mill House, the Muggles installed an axle made from a large oak log in the middle of the second-floor wall. The huge log juts out from and through the side of the building.

Attached to the waterside of the building is a waterwheel, resembling a Ferris wheel, constructed of an oak framework with mammoth-size, hollowed gourd buckets evenly distributed around it. The buckets sway back and forth with the slightest movement. The wheel is secured to the axle with a cotter pin.

At the other end of the axle, inside the second-floor mechanical room, the axle turns through the center of a giant wooden gear. The gear

turns the sprocket and pulley system, supplying power to the Mill House.

Rah's design of the waterwheel and ditch system seemed very simple, but a closer look at how complex it really was proved to the Muggles that he was a genius. It was easy to understand why the Muggles respected him, and often flocked to him when they needed a problem solved.

When the wheel was completed, Rah asked everyone to help him dam the water just above the Mill House. Beavers jumped into action like experts. Before anyone could think twice about it, the water drained from the creekbed, exposing the clay and rocky bank that supported the big stone building.

At the top of the bank, by the side of the building, the hollowed trunks of fallen oak trees were split in half, oiled generously with sap from maple trees, and assembled together, creating a trough system that connected to the ditch path. The path had been dug by groundhogs earlier and encircled the gardens and villages.

The bottom of the wheel nearly touched the drained creekbed. When everything was in place, Rah made a final inspection of his design and signaled the beavers to open the dam.

Water rushed through the opening with powerful force, taking only a few minutes to fill the dammed water site. It splashed and swirled around until it filled every space. As the water's surface reached the bottom of the wheel, first slowly, and then more rapidly, the wheel began to turn.

With each turn of the wheel, the gourd buckets reached in and captured a scoop of water. The buckets remained upright until they began their forward descent toward the oak trough. As they tilted forward, the water captured in each bucket on the wheel fell gracefully into the trough system. The ditches filled with water, flowing through the channels of Aura's first irrigation system, and producing the hydro-energy to operate the gear system of the wheat and grain milling machinery.

The pulleys were made from woven hemp ropes, strung over beams and attached to giant, wooden spools, each one powered by a crank handle on the side. By turning the crank, the rope and its load attached to the loose end could be raised and lowered with little effort. The pulley system allowed the Muggles to move heavy loads

from floor to floor in the Mill.

“Rah, you’ve done it again—how will we ever be able to thank you,” Pluck said.

“It almost makes me cry,” Pick added.

“Well, certainly I didn’t want to make anyone cry, but I am humbled by all of this praise, especially since I was just getting a job done—that’s all,” Rah replied.

Zyn was becoming increasingly more jealous of Rah. Rah was successful and visibly admired by nearly everyone. He resented Rah’s accomplishments and the attention the Muggles gave him. Zyn’s jealousy eventually consumed his spirit.

Each time Zyn heard a Muggle praise Rah, his mind and body filled with rage. The Muggles tried to reassure Zyn, but he didn’t feel good about himself, no matter how hard they tried to console him.

Zyn lost confidence in himself, and lost his self-esteem. His every thought and action became resentful and nasty. Zyn withdrew from his brother and the Muggles. The more time he spent alone, the more anger he felt and the unhappier he became. This unhappiness was very noticeable and even affected his physical appearance.

His beautiful smile turned into a frown. His golden strawberry-blonde hair looked dirty and unkempt. His clothing hung in tatters from his thinning body. Zyn’s wit was replaced by constant sarcasm. He didn’t have a kind word for anyone, or anything. He slept most of the day and no longer helped with the work. He simply refused to participate in any activity of any kind.

Rah was very frustrated with his brother’s behavior. Of the many challenges Rah had faced over the years, his inability to help his brother was disappointing. In search of solitude and answers, he went to the Willow Hideaway. There, Grandma Golda welcomed him, just as she had done the first time, nearly ten years ago.

“Rah, please don’t carry your brother’s problems on your shoulders. Every problem he has right now belongs only to him. There are some things that just can’t be fixed by anyone,” Golda told him.

“But I’ve lost my brother and I don’t have any idea why. I can’t reach him. He wants nothing to do with me, and I can’t help feeling like I have failed,” Rah told her.

“Rah, sometimes when we can’t see the positive in someone with our eyes, we must close them, and view that person with our hearts,” Golda gently instructed him.

While Rah anguished over his brother, Zyn was making plans to destroy him. “There just isn’t enough room here for both of us, and I can take care of that,” Zyn mumbled angrily to himself.

Chapter Ten: The Manchineet Tree

Zyn was a loud and nasty young man. It wasn't long before his attitude began to have a very bad effect on the Muggles.

Many of the villagers felt sorry for Zyn and tried every way they could to make him happy, but nothing worked. The Muggles were innocent and naive people. They didn't understand jealousy, and they didn't understand him. His rejection of them was very confusing to everyone, especially Nona.

"Didn't I do enough for him as a baby? What more could I have given to him? I gave Rah and Zyn the same amount of love—what did I do wrong?" Nona asked her father, Yur.

"Nona, this is not anything that anyone failed to provide for Zyn. This is what Zyn is not giving to himself," Yur explained to his daughter.

All of the confusion and trouble Zyn was constantly stirring up caused dissention and was beginning to divide friends and separate others from their own families.

There were a few Muggles who aligned themselves with Zyn. Initially it was because they felt he needed them, but in the end Zyn's constant abuse beat them into submission. He owned their spirits, and their individual identities were as he decided they would be. They did whatever he told them to, at whatever time, whenever he told them to do it.

Zyn was finally in charge of something—his own little gang of followers he called "Nevils."

"You had better find a way to keep those little buggers quiet. Just how do expect me to get any sleep, especially if those little critters keep yelping every darn morning? Yap—yap—yap—do you understand me, you little Nevil? Keep those winged musicmakers away from me," Zyn screamed at Teeter, sticking his finger right in front of his face.

Teeter, who once held the title of Keeper of the Aviary, was just a birdwatcher—what could he do? If the birds wanted to chirp, how was he going to stop them, he wondered and worried to himself, too frightened of Zyn to speak up.

"Seymour," an albino hawk, watched Zyn and Teeter from a treetop,

quietly waiting for Zyn to leave.

“Why do you take that from him? You don’t have to listen to that bully,” Seymour told Teeter from the security of his nest.

“That’s easy for you to say—you’re up there, and I’m down here,” Teeter responded. “Yeah, you sit up there where no one can even see you, and tell me how I should be sooo—so brave. Well, aren’t you just the big brave bird,” Teeter rambled on.

In a swift, rhythmic motion, Seymour landed right in front of Teeter and perched himself on a boulder.

“Do you hear yourself? You sound just as nasty as Zyn. You had better pay attention to who you hang around with,” he warned Teeter.

“I’ll take that as a compliment, you big fluff of nothing,” Teeter yelled back angrily.

“What’s happening around here? This nastiness is spreading like a bad disease, and I don’t like it—not one little bit—nope, not one little bit,” Seymour shouted as he flew off.

“Who cares what you think, Seymour. And who asked you anyway?” Teeter yelled back to him. “Go tell all of your feathered buddies to read the warning signs I’ll be hanging up today.

QUIET!

No singing or noise before eleven o’clock in the morning. Violators will pay with their life!

Zyn saw the signs, and knew right then and there he had Teeter just where he wanted and needed him to be—under his control.

“Hey—you little Nevil—it’s a good thing you took care of that bird problem, or you might have had a few of your own—get the message?” Zyn informed Teeter.

“No—no—problem, Zyn. You need a job done, just call me,” Teeter responded with his voice shaking, as he tugged up his baggy pants above his waistline.

“Yeah, I got him right where I want him, oh, yes I do, diddy do—do!” Zyn smirked as he turned and walked away.

Zyn, and his dedicated gang, had grown into a group of common

thugs. Besides Teeter, there were six other Nevils.

Jiitters is a sixteen-year-old boy who has a problem with his nerves. His hands shake out of control when his conscience bothered him, and lately they shook all of the time.

Chops, fifteen years old, is a muscular boy who chews gum, blows bubbles and pops them with his fingertips. He wears an old black leather jacket he found that has the word "C.H.O.P.S." spelled out across the back of it—his given name is Peter, but everyone calls him Chops. Everyone also knows that it isn't a good idea to ever call him Peter, not if they knew what is good for them. He is truly a bully.

Fraidy is seventeen years old and frightened of everything. He bites his nails all of the time, twisting his hands and head into positions that give him the right angle to chew every little piece of nail from his fingertips. He will do anything he is told to do, by anyone. He wears big blue sunglasses that extend out beyond his head.

Stubby is fifteen, short and fat. He is often seen jumping up and down behind other Nevils in front of him. Stubby asks questions about everything. If anyone ignores him, he yanks on their clothing until they answer him, and sometimes he yanks so hard he tears the clothing he is tugging on.

Boggs, eighteen, always has a dirty face and smells like swamp water. His clothing have green mold on them and are nearly in shreds. He doesn't say too much; most of the time he just grunts.

Patch is fourteen. Never nervous, he is totally carefree and has a "whatever" attitude. He will go with anyone and will try anything at least once or twice. Just dare him to do something and he will. He is not a thrill seeker; he just doesn't seem to care much about anything.

The Nevils are terrorists, and very threatening to the Muggles; even the Greeblies are a bit uneasy around this group. They rarely do anything alone, traveling in a group unless otherwise ordered by Zyn.

Rah wasn't afraid of any of them, including his brother, but he had suffered several injuries caused by them and their nasty pranks. These bad-boy Nevils and Zyn entertained themselves by causing everyone problems. Nearly every Muggle had been victimized by a Nevil at one time or another.

The Nevils built a new home for Zyn and themselves in Hazy Hollow, at the top of the Manchineet Tree, next to Seven Secret Swamp. Their

home was a very large shanty tree house. It was made from scraps of lumber and junk they found lying around on the beach.

The Manchineet Tree sheds radioactive pollen that has caused Zyn and the Nevils' skin to blister and discolor. It made their nails thick and crusty, and the whites of their eyes yellow and bloodshot.

They became not only nasty but lazy as well. Zyn developed severe allergies, which causes his nose to drip constantly. His joints ache and he suffers from headaches. His physical health is as bad as his mental health.

Zyn's naturally curly, strawberry-blond hair that once hung just below his shoulders was falling out in clumps. His very long eyelashes no longer outline his emerald green eyes. He was ill, very ill, but he would have never swallowed his pride to ask anyone for help.

"I'll die before I ask that brother of mine for anything. I can take care of myself. I just have to get out of this place," Zyn informed his gang.

"I'll let you bums know when I've figured it all out," he told them as he drifted off to sleep.

That night, Rah, too, was searching for answers to his brother's problems. "Why has this happened? How could it be that my brother is becoming sicker every day, and I can't help him?" he asked Yur.

"All questions aren't answered in a day, Rah. Give it some time," Yur said to him as Rah set out toward the Mill House and the comfort of his bed. Rah lay in his bed and opened the Ancient Book of Tales. He read:

The Year of the Rabbits

And so it was that the rabbits with protruding teeth lost their gentleness and ravaged the continent. They began their scourge with few in number. They had a need to control the limited food supply. The rabbits had shown no mercy to the starving people of this land. They ate every morning before dawn until their bellies were plump and round, leaving not even a bite for any other living being.

The days became long and lonely for the rabbits, but soon they had plenty of company. The rabbits were the only well-fed animal species on the continent, and they multiplied in number.

They now had to fight one another for the food supply that only a few

months before had been plentiful and shared by all. Now the supplies were depleted, and some of the rabbits began to starve.

And so it came to pass that the rabbits had become the food supply the people of Aura had patiently waited for. And the hare had learned that greed might mean extinction.

As Rah drifted off to sleep, he wished that his mother could be here with him—not Nona, Grandma Golda, Grandpa Yur, nor any of the Muggles. For the first time in his life, he needed his mother.

Rah often dreamed of his mother, and wished his brother would feel his pain and unhappiness. His dreams were so real to him that he often had to pinch himself, just to make sure they were only dreams.

Rah held his hand in front of his face, and the golden key that hung from the chain bracelet around his wrist dangled before his eyes.

Golda had given Rah the chain bracelet with the golden key on his sixteenth birthday. She told him that it was clenched in his tiny fist the day he and Zyn arrived on Aura.

Rah had always cherished the bracelet, because he believed his mother must have placed it in his hand.

He had never really given any thought to what the key may unlock or open, until now.

Chapter Eleven: The Big Plan

Zyn spent most of his early mornings in his watchtower, looking out over the ocean. Through the misty morning haze, he could faintly see a dark island. The island was situated southwest of Aura, about two miles off the coastline.

The island was a mystery to the Muggles, who feared what might be there. Yur knew more about the island of Dezra than he had ever told the Muggles. He felt there was no need to worry them, because he knew none of them should ever have a good reason to visit the island.

Zyn was looking for happiness and, in his own mind, Dezra was his hope for a future, one that would include the sovereign reign of his own country. He and the Nevils couldn't get what they wanted on Aura, but Zyn believed they could have everything they ever wanted on Dezra.

"Why do you think Yur never wanted us to know anything about Dezra?" he asked the Nevils.

"I bet there's stuff on that island he wants to keep for himself," Chops suggested.

"Ya know, I bet there are treasures all over that place," Zyn said with absolute certainty. "Yeah, that's what it is—that has to be it!"

"What are we gonna do about it?" Stubby asked.

"That's why I'm the leader of this pathetic group. The only thing you little buggers do is ask questions," Zyn answered Stubby, while directing his comments to all of the Nevils at the same time.

"I'm workin' on a plan to get us there. When it's ready, I'll let you know," Zyn proclaimed.

The following morning, Zyn laid out his plan to the Nevils.

"We're gonna build a boat, a sailboat," Zyn informed the scruffy gang.

"A boat—you say we're gonna build a boat?" Boggs questioned him.

Yeah, that's what I said—a B-O-A-T, boat, sailboat," Zyn said angrily.

"How are we gonna build a B-O-A-T, boat, sailboat, Zyn?" Stubby

asked.

“Wait one minute—whoa—whoa—wait just one minute, here—just what are we gonna do with this B-O-A-T, boat, sailboat?” Chops yelled, as he strutted forward, blowing a huge bubble with his gum and popping it with his finger, waving his hands in front of him.

“Hey—who’s in charge here? Is there any question in any of your minds that I tell you what, where, when, and how things are done around here?” Zyn said, in a low, nasty voice as he looked down over the Nevils.

“But, just to make it clear, we’re gonna build a boat and sail across to that island—right over there,” Zyn said as he pointed to Dezra.

Jitter’s whole body shook, and Fraidy chewed frantically on his fingernails, his hands and face distorted to get just the right angle, as Zyn barked orders to the Nevils.

“Let’s get it movin’,” Zyn snapped, clapping his hands together. “Yeah—yeah—yeah—we can build a B-O-A-T—Yeah, right!” Patch said with his usual sarcasm.

“Just get your lazy, no account, Nevil stubs into motion and find some logs,” Zyn told Patch.

Patch grunted and walked off with the other Nevils.

“If he says we can build a B-O-A-T, than we can,” Teeter shouted to the others who were ahead of him.

“Yeah—yeah—yeah!” Chops yelled back to him.

By afternoon, the beach was filled with logs and huge balls of twine the Nevils had taken by force from Pluck.

Zyn sat with his back propped against a boulder in the warm, white sand and watched the Nevils come and go, gathering supplies.

He didn’t move, other than to change positions, crossing, uncrossing, and recrossing his outstretched legs.

“You know, we could use some help over here,” Chops said to Zyn.

“What part don’t you understand, you short on brains, short in size, bugger?” Zyn stood over him, yelling and kicking sand in his face.

“I’m the one in charge here. If you don’t like the arrangement, we can leave you behind when we go,” Zyn yelled.

“No—no—no—I was just tellin’ ya we were—we were wearin’ out. I—I got it!” Chops, answered him with his hands bowing in front of him.

Chops, clasping his hands behind his back, turned grudgingly and got back to work.

By the second day the Nevils had nearly finished building the crude boat.

The hull was constructed of tree branches tied together with the hemp twine taken from Pluck. The Manchineet Tree was stripped of every inch of its bark, and the Nevils’ tree house was disassembled and its lumber used. Every scrap of building supplies were needed to finish the boat.

Rubber tree pitch was heated in big, black, iron kettles over open fires until it melted into the consistency of liquid tar, to waterproof the rickety hull of the vessel. The Nevils used swab-like brushes to spread the very, very hot tar across every inch of the boat’s interior and exterior.

By the time the Nevils were finished, their tiny hands were blistered and burned. Their bodies were singed black from the heat of the rubbery tar. When nightfall arrived, their skin felt as though it was on fire—they leapt into the ocean waves where the soothing salt water cooled the heat of their second-and third-degree burns. The tar remained on their skin after they left the water and hardened into big black scabs all over their little bodies.

The Nevils sat for hours, long into the night, painfully picking the tar scabs from one another.

“You no good, no good for nothin’, nonsensical nitwits did a pathetic job on this boat, but it’s all we’ve got—we’re leavin’ at dawn! Now, be off with all of you! I don’t wanna see you little buggers ‘til dawn,” Zyn yelled at the injured Nevils, and they scattered in every direction.

Dawn spread across the horizon with a bright red glow, and a gentle breeze blew across the beach. Giant palm leaves rustled above. The Nevils jumped from their damp thatched mats and ran toward the beach.

“Where have you buggers been?” Zyn yelled as the Nevils ran through

the sand toward the boat.

The Muggles watched sadly from the bluff as the Nevils readied the boat and pushed it off the beach.

Rah hurried to the beach, hoping he could convince his brother not to leave. “Zyn, you do this and you may never be able to return to Aura,” Rah warned him.

“Who would want to? I’ll have my own country, and you’ll have yours,” Zyn yelled to his brother.

“You mind your own business, and I’ll take care of mine!” he continued yelling as Rah walked sadly away.

Rah watched as the primitive boat drifted off and into the hazy darkness. His heart felt like it was caught in his throat as he stood by the water’s edge, where the waves lapped at his feet.

Rah’s eyes filled with tears that fell down over his cheeks and dropped into the ocean. As the tears spilled from Rah’s eyes and into the water, the ocean floor began to rumble. Waves rose as high as mountaintops, engulfing Zyn, the Nevils, and their boat.

Zyn and the Nevils were swept away by the tidal wave. The boat broke into hundreds of pieces as it swirled around and around, and up and down, and up and over gigantic waves that ripped and tore the rickety craft apart.

Chapter Twelve: The Shadow Monsters

Rah would never forget what he had seen that morning, nor the last words his twin brother had said to him.

“I don’t feel like I can go on without my brother, Nona,” Rah cried to the woman who had been like a mother to him.

“Rah, now you don’t know what has happened, or if anything has happened to your brother—he may have survived just fine. Knowing your brother, if he is one thing, surely you know he is a fighter. Let’s face it, Rah, he is just too darn nasty to die,” Nona said, trying to reassure him.

Rah needed to find out if Zyn and the Nevils had survived, but how, he wondered?

Swish! Something swooped past Rah. He was so totally lost in his thoughts that he didn’t even notice. Swish! It swooped by again. This time Rah looked up.

“Seymour!” cried Rah. “You can do this for me! You could watch them from the air and tell me what has happened when you return!”

The noble hawk willingly promised to carry out the task. Without hesitation, Seymour soared off toward Dezra.

Dezra is a dark island. It has sheer sides that drop straight into the ocean at places. This rocky island has little room for vegetation, other than a few weeds that grow between the rocks scattered about its coastline.

Circling the tiny island, Seymour could see pieces of the boat’s wreckage lying upon the rocky beach. Bruised, choking and gasping for air, the Nevils washed up on the dirty beach of Dezra. Zyn and the Nevils were slowly emerging from underneath the rubble. The first glimpse of their new home was shocking—they were stunned and terrified.

As Zyn and the Nevils wiped the sand from their eyes on Dezra, Rah was pacing up and down the beach on Aura. His head was bent, his hands clenched tightly behind his back, and fear had consumed him.

Back on Dezra, towering Shadow Monsters danced across the sand and

rocks—and they were headed straight for the castaways! Zyn and the Nevils ran as fast as they could to get away from the monsters, but everywhere they went, the monsters followed! Frantically they searched for shelter and finally found refuge in one of the caves carved within the lifeless rock clusters.

Once inside they huddled together, breathless and too frightened to leave the safety of the cave's darkness. They had no idea where the Shadow Monsters had come from, but they did know they were not going outside until they were gone!

"Look outside and see if they're still there!" Zyn commanded Teeter.

"But what if they are? They might eat me!" snapped Teeter.

"I don't want to hear any complaining. Just go!" Zyn snapped back.

Teeter, his chin quivering, peeked outside. He saw only the distant light from Aura glowing against the darkness surrounding Dezra. Cautiously, he stepped outside—"Eeeek!" he screamed, as a huge monster appeared. As fast as lightning strikes, he ran back into the safety of the cave.

Throughout the day, each of the Nevils took turns checking to see if the monsters had gone, and each time the monsters were still there. Finally, there was no way Zyn could avoid taking his turn.

He walked confidently past the Nevils, but once he stood at the edge of the cave's mouth, his legs felt unsteady, and his heart pounded like a drum. Swallowing hard, he stepped outside. No light could be seen from Aura. He looked everywhere, but the Shadow Monsters had disappeared!

Zyn thought to himself, on Dezra I am in control! Even the monsters fear me.

He called the Nevils outside to look for food. They scurried around in the dark, tripping over their own feet and bumping into each other, all the while looking over their shoulders to see if Shadow Monsters were following them.

In their search for food they found seaweed that had washed ashore, and small patches of dune grass that had grown between the rocks. The Nevils grabbed and pulled at the grass and gathered the weeds, trying to get their share of what little food existed.

After eating the greens, indigestion caused their bellies to swell and ache. They lay on the beach, holding their swollen bellies, belching loudly, and rolling around in pain. The pain made them forget about the Shadow Monsters, and they fell fast asleep right where they were lying.

When they awakened, they could see the distant light of Aura and, to their dismay, the Shadow Monsters, who had reappeared with a vengeance.

“Be off with you! This is my country now,” Zyn commanded the Shadow Monsters, but they just kept following them.

The Nevils jumped to their feet in total terror as the monsters danced all around them, towering especially over a shrieking Zyn.

Seymour winged his way home where Rah and the Muggles were anxiously awaiting his return. After he had described the events in detail, Rah felt more at ease. He turned to Nona, wrapping his arms around her tiny plump frame and said, “At least they’re alive, and much safer than they realize.”

Chapter Thirteen: Feast or Famine

Zyn stood by the cave's opening, gazing at the sunlit coastline of Aura. His body was frail, and his skin milky gray and diseased. He had stared through this doorway of disparity for seven years, now. With little forethought, he slid his weathered hand into the pocket of his tattered and filthy smock. Zyn's broken and cracked fingernails snagged the loosened threads of the ragged material, until his hand rested at the bottom of his smock pocket.

The bottom of the pocket was filled with sand and dirt. He grasped the seam in his fingertips, pulling the pocket inside out, and watched as the debris fell to the ground, making a little pile on the ground next to him.

On the top of the pile he saw an object, which looked like a rock. Zyn reached down and picked it up. Wiping the rock against the belly of his smock to clean it off, he got a better look at it and knew immediately what it was—the Worry Stone that Grandma Golda had given to him as a boy.

As he rubbed his thumb across the indentation in the center of this magical keepsake, a momentary smile spread across his sad face. The smile disappeared quickly, however, replaced by the furrowed brow of an angry young man.

"It isn't fair," he said aloud to himself. "Rah has everything. He has always had everything. It's just not fair that I am here, sitting in a dark and damp cave, surrounded by monsters that only allow me outside at night. All I have are these blasted Nevils who complain and argue constantly!"

He hit the wall of the cave with his fist, then sensing someone nearby, he whirled around. "Whadda ya want, Teeter?" he growled.

The creature standing before him barely resembled the loudmouthed Nevil who had come to Dezra. Teeter's eyes were glossy and catlike, making it easier for him to see in the dark. Wild hair covered his arms and legs. His fingernails were long, resembling tiger claws protruding from the tips of his tiny hands and webbed feet.

Teeter was not the only Nevil who looked like this. All of the Nevils had undergone changes in their physical appearance. Their bodies had adapted to the dark and rocky world in which they lived. They wore

the evil that filled their hearts proudly upon their flesh.

“We don’t like it here! We’re sick of eating weeds! There’s nothing here but rocks, rocks, and more rocks! We want to go somewhere else!” Teeter said, folding and propping his hairy arms on his protruding bloated belly.

“You Nevils are never happy! I took you away from Rah and the Muggles, didn’t I? What more do you want?” Zyn snapped in response.

“We want some of Aura’s grapes and peaches and apples and tomatoes and—“Teeter’s mouth watered, drool running down and over his chin, at the thought of all the succulent fruits and vegetables that were so plentiful on Aura. He looked directly into Zyn’s eyes and growled, “You got that?”

Zyn looked at him as if Teeter had lost his mind, then threw his head back and laughed. “Ha! Ha! Ha! You fool! Our boat crashed. How do you think we would ever get back to Aura, much less go somewhere else? Huh? Answer me that!” Zyn screamed at him so loudly, Teeter had to cover his ears with his hands.

“Well, that’s your problem!” replied Teeter. “You’re our fearless leader —our big thinker-upper and problem solver. Either you get busy finding a way, or—or else!” After this verbal pelting from Zyn, Teeter stomped back to the other Nevils.

“Whoa—I didn’t think ya had it in ya, Teeter,” Chops said to him as he patted Teeter on the back.

Zyn sat down in the cave, his legs folded beneath him on the cold, damp, and mossy floor. “You Nevils have gone too far! Just how do you expect me to make a boat from rocks? Hey, if you’ve got some idea to get us off this island, I’ll listen. If not, don’t come cryin’ to me and expect me to find a way out of here.”

Several days later, as Zyn walked along the dark coastline, he could hear the anger in the voices of the Nevils as they fought frantically for every last, little piece of seaweed. Glaring up, into the endless skyward pit of darkness, he clumsily tripped over the edge of a sharp, hard object by the water’s edge. Groping around in the darkness, he felt the textured surface of the giant clamshell.

Tugging and pulling, nearly panicked that it would be washed back out to sea, he drug the mammoth shell up, and pulled it onto the pebbled beach. “If there’s one, there has to be more!” he shouted.

Hearing his shout, the Nevils' seaweed frenzy halted. They ran to see what was going on. "What's all the shouting?" asked Boggs.

"Quickly, you shaggy little buggers! Get over here and help me pull these vessels from the water before they wash back out to sea!" Zyn commanded.

Tugging and pulling, the tiny Nevils managed to get five of them out of the cold water just before dawn broke on Aura.

"We—we gotta get inside! Right now! Right now!" Fraidy said frantically, his body shaking, his hands clenched tightly together underneath his quivering chin.

"The monsters—they'll be back any minute!" Patch said to the other frightened Nevils.

Inside the cave, Zyn was silent for a moment. A sly look spread across his face as he rubbed his open hands together. "We'll leave tonight, you complaining bunch of little urchins! You'll have all the fruits and vegetables you want. I have figured out how I can get what you want, and what I want," he said as he pulled some moss from the cave's wall, and held it up in front of him like it was a prize.

Zyn looked at Chops and said, "I need Bordonian Moss! Lots of it. We'll need to fill one of the vessels with that stuff!"

With that the Nevils scattered in all directions, heading deeply within the cavernous structure to find the spored plant life. The lime-green moss, with purple curly sprouts, clung to the walls of these mythical-looking rooms. Even in the dark the Nevils had no problem finding plenty of this special plant.

The Nevils' clawed fingers slid under the moss, and like a knife peeling an apple, they skinned it from the moist rock formations. When their arms were filled, they carried it back to Zyn.

"What are we gonna use this stuff for, Zyn?" asked Stubby, who was standing on top of a huge pile of moss they had harvested.

"When Rah and I were kids, we explored the caves along the shoreline of Aura. In one of the caves we found some of this stuff. Rah got very sick from the moss, and fell into a deep, deep sleep. Like a dummy, I carried him outside and saved his life," Zyn said with a bitter laugh. "Now, I'll get even with him!"

“But what if it makes us sleepy?” Patch asked.

“You ninnyWhat do you think you’ve been sleeping in for seven years?” Zyn snarled as he swatted the back of Patch’s head.

“After we land on Aura, we’ll put some of this stuff in Rah’s face, drag him back to the vessel, lay him on his new bed, and bring him to his new home, right here, on Dezra. He will sleep—forever!” Zyn said, with a vengeful tone to his voice.

“We won’t have to worry about the Muggles. They’re too frightened of us. With Rah asleep, I’ll have control over everything on Aura! No one will know what happened to him. Not ever. You won’t tell anyone, at anytime—you understand me—not ever! ” Zyn ordered.

Using their webbed hands as paddles, the Nevils rowed the shell vessels across the calm night ocean toward Aura. They came to rest on Aura’s moonlit beach. The Nevils jumped out of their shell vessels. The cool sand was soft, and it felt good on the rough soles of their feet. The Nevils had nearly forgotten how wonderful it felt to dig their toes into this fine, silky, sea dust

“Come here!” hissed Zyn. Everyone gathered around him awaiting his instructions.

“Teeter, you divide these imbeciles up into groups. Go to the barn and get baskets. Fill them with food and bring them back to the vessels. Fraidy, grab a piece of that moss and come with me!”

“Who, me? You want me?” Fraidy asked, his teeth chattering and his body shaking from head to toe.

“Yes, you—you little coward!” Zyn barked.

The Nevils scurried up the lush leafy banks, quietly taking in the fragrance of the honeysuckle blossoms. Their minds danced with the thought of the rich food supply—they had dreamed of it for seven years. Zyn and Fraidy were nearing Crystal Creek, just as the Nevils began grabbing food with their hands. Every fruit and vegetable in sight was gathered up.

The door of the Mill House creaked as Zyn slowly nudged it open. Fraidy tiptoed backwards about five feet behind Zyn. He was totally panicked as he followed Zyn, carrying the clump of moss in his clenched fists. Zyn turned around and gave him the most evil look he had ever seen, and waved at him to hurry. Placing his finger up to his

lips, he signaled Fraidy to be quiet. Zyn grabbed the moss from Fraidy's hands and entered the room.

Looking at his brother sleeping peacefully, he felt no remorse as he shoved and pressed the moss against Rah's face. Rah struggled for only a few seconds before he lay totally limp. His arms drooped over the sides of his simple wooden bed frame, and the color left his face.

"Fraidy!" Zyn whispered the command. "Get over here and help me tie up the ends of this blanket. We'll use it to drag him down to the beach. Quickly, you nitwit, we don't have all night!"

Rah's body was bumped and rolled and battered as Zyn pulled and tugged, struggling to drag it to the beach. When they arrived at the bluff, Zyn, with a grin on his face, took his foot and shoved Rah's body over the edge. It rolled and rolled, down over the bank, through and over the sand, until it hit the side of the vessel.

"Voila, as Chef Franc would say," Zyn exclaimed, throwing his hands in the air and declaring his success.

Just as Zyn began his hike down the hill next to the bluff, he heard the Nevils coming. "Shut up, you loudmouth idiots," he hissed.

They were silent as they struggled to carry the overloaded baskets down the hill, dropping oranges, beans, and apples, and even a few loaves of bread they had stolen from the kitchen.

"Get this stuff loaded, and let's get out of here before anyone sees us!" Zyn commanded.

The Nevils loaded their loot into the vessels and laid Rah inside the moss-bedded craft they had prepared especially for him. As the vessels drifted off the shoreline and into the tide, they nearly sank from the weight of the harvest that had been loaded aboard. Rowing frantically toward Dezra, the Nevils felt satisfied.

Their bellies were full, they had plenty of food, and now, just as Zyn had described, they could return any night they chose, to take anything they wanted. Rah was asleep—forever.

Chapter Fourteen: A Winged Investigation

Shortly after Zyn and the Nevils landed back on Dezra, the sun was rising on Aura. The robins awakened and flew to the Mill House to sing their morning songs for Rah—but he wasn't there. His door was slightly open and his bed was empty. They searched all over, but Rah was nowhere to be found!

Winging as fast as they could, they raced to Golda and Yur's house. There they landed in the yard, squawking and screeching, and making such a racket they awakened both Golda and Yur.

"What's going on out here?" Yur asked loudly, as he came to the door with one hand cupped around his ear. He was rubbing his eyes with the other hand, and his suspenders were hanging on either side of his wrinkled pants.

The robins all tried to speak at once, and Yur could not understand a thing they were saying. Golda appeared in the doorway dressed in her yellow flowered nightgown.

"Grandpa, what's wrong?" she asked as he pushed by her, mumbling.

"Gotta go get my horn. Can't hear a blasted word they're saying!" Yur told his wife.

Seeing the birds in such a frenzy, Golda spoke soothingly to them. "Calm down, now, my beautiful feathered friends," she said, her own voice so calm that they soon stopped flapping their wings and became quiet.

By this time, all of the excitement had awakened the other Muggles. As they gathered around to find out what was happening—Carmine, a big red cardinal, stepped forward from amidst the group of robins. "Rah's gone! We can't find him anywhere," Carmine said frantically.

Yur stood on the porch with his horn to his ear. "Now, what's all this foss?"

Golda turned to Yur. "Grandpa, we've got a big problem! Carmine and the robins can't find Rah. Rah is missing," she attempted to tell him.

"Who's kissing Rah?" Yur questioned. With that Golda repeated herself, yelling directly into Yur's horn with frustration.

All of the Muggles began to speak at once. “Where could he be? What could have happened to him? We’ve got to find him! He may be in trouble, but how? where? when?” they cried, with tears streaming from their eyes.

Golda hushed them and told them not to worry. “Seymour will find Rah,” she said reassuringly. But her heart, too, was heavy with worry.

Just then, Seymour swooped over the crowd, “Somebody called my name?” he asked as he landed on the porch banister. “Whatever it is, it’ll have to wait ‘till I tell you what I saw this morning!” Seymour said without hesitation.

“I heard a noise early this morning and flew out to take a look. Didn’t see anything ‘til I flew out over the water. Those darn Nevils and Zyn were just landing back on Dezra. Swooping down a bit closer, from about a thousand feet in the air, I saw Rah.

“He was lying in this giant clamshell and he was covered with that green stuff from the caves. Fast asleep, I think. I could hear Zyn’s big mouth ordering those little buggers to take Rah inside the cave. We’ve gotta do something, and fast!

“Now, what was it you wanted me for?” Seymour asked. “It couldn’t have been more important than that!”

The Muggles gasped at the thought of those wretched creatures hurting Rah. “Poor Rah! Poor Rah!” Nona cried out as she began to sob.

Everyone was frightened at the thought of Rah being at the mercy of Zyn, but they also feared that Zyn may return again to Aura, to live. This would surely mean the end of their peaceful world.

As the Muggles wiped the tears from their eyes, Yur was enraged. He could not let Zyn get away with this evil plan of his. “I might be old, and I may be hard of hearing, but I’m not stupid,’ Yur said sternly. “We’ll go to Dezra, and we’ll bring Rah home!”

Yur sent Pitter and Patter to the Mill House to retrieve the Ancient Book of Tales. It was hidden in a secret place that only Yur and Rah knew about, until now.

A nervous Pitter and Patter walked through the open door of the Mill House. It was a very eerie feeling, to see no one inside and yet everything in place, just as Rah had left it. Solemnly, they walked over

to Rah's empty bed, and slid it away from the window.

Kneeling on the floor just beneath the windowsill, they saw the small trapdoor that Yur had described to them. It squeaked as they struggled to pull it up, and the weight of the trapdoor caused them to fall over backwards on the floor as it opened. Pitter held on to Patter's feet as he dropped into the hole and grabbed the ancient book.

They hurridly brought the book to Yur. Opening it to "The Year of the Voyagers," Yur found the information he needed to help them construct strong oceangoing rafts.

His eyes sparked with a youthful energy as he instructed some of the Muggles to gather tree limbs and hefty vines. Others were ordered to harvest Chinese lantern-plant pods, and to fill them with fireflies. Seymour and Carmine wove baskets to carry the pods of light.

By evening the rafts were readied with catapults, and the baskets of pods had been loaded aboard. The Muggles had worked with diligence, not fully understanding how all of these things would be used.

Yur stood in front of the Muggles gathered on the beach. "The one weapon we have, my children, is the Nevils' fear of Shadow Monsters. They don't realize that these monsters are not real.

"Apparently, Zyn and the Nevils did not listen when I read the passages from 'The Year of the Moon.' Their loss is our gain. We can make these monsters appear or disappear, which will keep them there on Dezra forever," Yur proclaimed.

"These pods filled with fireflies will create light against the darkness—hence, the Nevils' most feared enemy, Shadow Monsters," Yur said, as he wiggled his fingers in front of him like a witch.

Chapter Fifteen: The Lantern Lights

As the Muggles' rafts neared Dezra, Yur shouted, "Ready! Aim! Fireflies!" and a warlike scene broke out. The Muggles released the catapults, hurling lantern lights into the air. Flocks of birds flew overhead, dropping more and more pods onto the island. Everywhere, balls of light flew through the air and landed on the rocky shore.

One after another the Muggles loaded and reloaded the catapults, firing the pods toward Dezra. While some of the Muggles fired, others continued to row the rescue raft toward the pebbled beach where Zyn and the Nevils lay sleeping. They had passed out right there after feasting on the stolen spoils, and their overstuffed bellies and distorted figures blended in with the rocky landscape.

Whizzz! A lantern flew past Teeter's head, waking him.

"Help me!" he screamed, as more fireballs flew past him.

The noise awakened Zyn and the others, and as they opened their eyes, Shadow Monsters began to appear all around them. Frightened and still half asleep, they jumped up and ran around in circles in massive hysteria. The Nevils had never seen so many Shadow Monsters at one time!

The Muggles' rescue raft landed next to a huge rock and was secured to the rock by a rope. Quickly, Muggles climbed out of the raft, while a barrage of pods filled the air with glittering lights. Grabbing ropes and other supplies, they scurried past the shrieking Nevils, who in their panic never noticed the intruders. Using the map Golda had prepared from Seymour's investigation, they headed to the cave opening and lurched inside.

They found Rah perched high on a ledge, lying unconscious on a bed of Bordonian Moss. He appeared to be lifeless as they lowered him with ropes to the cave's cold, damp floor. After securing him on a stretcher, they swiftly scampered out of the cavern of darkness.

Their feet were aching with pain as they walked across the sharp stones that covered this wicked beach. They carried Rah to the water's edge and loaded him aboard the rescue raft where Yur awaited his arrival.

Yur could barely refrain from crying as he ran his arthritic hands over

Rah's frail forehead, while the raft drifted back out to sea. "You are safe now, son, he whispered to Rah. "We'll take care of you, just as we have cared for you always!"

With a strong breeze at their backs, the Muggles set sail for Aura. Halfway across the seaway, the cool breeze began to revive Rah. "Oh, oh, oh!" he groaned. Opening his eyes, he said, "I feel sick. Where am I? What happened?" As he questioned Yur, he tried to sit up, unsuccessfully, nearly causing the raft to tip over.

"Oh, no!" cried the Muggles who were rowing the raft. "Lay still, Rah! We're in the ocean. You'll flip the raft," they yelled. Obediently, Rah lay there still and didn't make another attempt to sit up. The Muggles told him about Zyn and the Nevils' plans to take control of Aura.

"There won't be any more of Zyn's little plans like this one, not ever again," declared Yur. He explained how they made the journey to save him. And how they left the lanterns behind on Dezra.

"Those harmful buggers will never come out again, 'cause our friends the Shadow Monsters will keep them captive—forever!" Yur proclaimed.

Back on Aura, Rah spent many nights wondering if his brother and the Nevils would starve to death confined in their cavernous prison.

With unwavering compassion, Rah requested that Seymour make daily deliveries of food. They were to be dropped on Dezra from the air. Guided by the light of the lanterns, Seymour faithfully carried out this task each night.

To this very day, many years after these events occurred, you can still see the glow of the lanterns of peace reflecting against the night sky.

So, each time darkness falls upon the daylight, and you look up and see the stars twinkling in the distance, you will know that Rah is asleep, and all around him is at peace!

And so, it has been told by The Ancient Book of Tales in—

"The Year of the Starlight"

Character Glossary

ACTAVIA, Keeper of the Gardens, daughter of Pick and Pluck.

AUDREY, Lady Catherine's personal maid, mother of Kathleen.

AURIAN, Citizen of Aura before the Thirty Year War.

BAHBIES, Naddie and Neddie's name for the twins.

BENJAMIN, a stuttering sea cow.

BLUSTER, Golda's nephew, son of Renona, Golda's youngest sister and her husband, died when Bluster was seven years old, he is now sixteen and very insecure. He loves Nardles, a Muggle/NeviL

BROOZER, Zyn's pet Nardle.

BUMPER, nine years old, a very shy boy who blushes easily with brown eyes.

CARMINE, a big red cardinal, a basket weaver and friend of Seymour.

CHARLIE, Groundskeeper for the House of Sheridan, plays the violin.

CHERUBS, see Ocean Cherubs.

CHOPS, fifteen years old, a muscular boy, who chews bubblegum and blows bubble he breaks with his fingertips, wears an old black leather jacket he found, with the letters "C.H.O.P.S." embroidered across the back. His given name is Peter (see Peter) a Muggle/Nevil.

DR. DIBBS, a sixty-five year old physician from The Village South.

ELDER, title given to Yur, the oldest male on Aura. He is married to Golda, and is the only grandfather. He is the guardian of The Ancient Book of Tales.

FIFE, a thirty-two year old single man who plays the flute made from a swamp tail.

FRAIDY, seventeen years old, wears big blue sunglasses that extend beyond his face, a Muggle/Nevil, frightened, bites his nails.

GOLDA, oldest female on Aura, aged seventy-nine, married to Yur, most often referred to as Grandma, slightly overweight, large round belly, short plump legs, olive complexion, wears a magnifying glass on a chain around her neck, a pinafore apron over a long flowered housedress, brown walking shoes, and carries a Worry Stone in her pocket, has a calming personality.

GREEBLIES, ratlike rodents with long tails and course gray hair with black tips that covers their bodies; their faces resemble a rabbit's, with ears that curl slightly forward at the top. Their legs are short, but they can jump five feet in the air from a sitting position. They are nocturnal garbage eaters, daylight pests, live in Sticky Icky Swamp, or under boulders. They are afraid of Nardles, but not Muggles.

GWENIE, Lady Catherine's nanny and later her twin's nanny.

HARMON, Golda and Yur's oldest son.

JITTERS, sixteen years old and has a problem with his nerves. His hands shake terribly when he feels guilty, a Muggle/Nevil.

KATHLEEN, eighteen-year-old daughter of Audrey, the first-floor maid for The House of Sheridan, plays harp.

LADY CATHERINE, Cat is her nickname. She is the birth mother of Rah and Zyn, was married to Sir Geophrey Lutrell, she was three years old when her parents died and she became Lady Catherine of the House of Sheridan. Beautiful blonder, tall and thin, wears elegant garments.

LOVEBIRDS, Bumper's pets Mick and May, green with blue and yellow heads.

MEDIMUT, Dr. Dibbs' pet Nardle.

MUGGLES, Humans left behind on Aura, the Forgotten People, conscientious objectors, sick and diseased, physically challenged, elderly, blind, deaf, savants, dwarfs, learning disabled, the Have Not's. They became genetically mutated humans, hybrid humans, resemble children when fully grown, large hairless ears, tiny ears, large oval eyes, eyelids with no eyelashes, blue, violet, brown and green, lump cheeks, narrow shoulders, thin arms chubby hands, three fingers and one thumb, no fingernails, thin legs, chubby feet, four toes, no toenails, round plump bellies, half-moon shaped belly button, height: 3'-4', weight: 45-90 lbs., skin color: white, brown, beige or olive, vegetarians.

MUGGLEBABY, Muggle pregnancies are fourteen months long, birth height is between 12"-14", birth weight between 1.5-2 lbs.

NADDIE, from the sea of Nebula, a Spooner of the Deep, twin sister of Neddie, misty young ladies who cared for the bahbies, the nickname they gave to the twins as they cared for them on their ocean voyage.

NARDLES, Sand dogs, live in sand burrows along the shoreline of Aura. They can smell Greeblies a mile away, and eat them for dinner. They have long beige hair that drags on the ground, bodies the size of lions, and are friendly to Muggles and Rah and Zyn. Muggles have them for pets and for protection from the Greeblies.

NEVILS, Zyn's gang of followers, used to be Muggles, who are now frightened of them, they have become terrorists with bad attitudes. Nevils have made their new home on Aura in Hazy Hollow in the Machineet Tree, next to Seven Secret Swamp. Bodies were singed from hot black tar, blistered and burned, their physical appearance changed after they landed on Dezra, they wore evil proudly on their flesh, arms became hairy, bloated bellies, long nails, claw-like fingers. They are frightened of Shadow Monsters.

NEDDIE, see Naddie.

NONA, She is forty-six years old, the unmarried daughter of Yur and Golda. Wears a purple and yellow flowered housedress, old leather work boots and ankle socks, wire-rimmed half glasses hang at the end of her nose. She has no children of her own, but loves all children, and is the surrogate mother of Rah and Zyn.

OCEAN CHERUB, cherub protectors with bows and arrows, Cherub of the North, Cherub of the South, Cherub of the East, Cherub of the West, protected the twins on their ocean voyage.

PATCH, He is a fourteen-year-old boy who is never nervous, would go with anyone and try anything at least once or twice. He is a thrill seeker, who only needs to be dared to attempt anything, very sarcastic, grumbles, has little to say about anything, but wants what he wants, when he wants it, a Muggle/Nevil.

PATTER, a preteen boy who loves Pitter. He and Pitter never stopped holding hands until the babies arrived. Pink freckled cheeks, blue eyes, white complexion, square shoulders, right handed, known for snapping his fingers, wears loosely fitting overalls, and a bright yellow handkerchief hangs from his right pocket.

PETER, see Chops.

PITTER, a preteen girl, aged twelve, who loves Patter (see Patter), that daughter of Winkle, Keeper of the Bees. She is left handed, has a delicate body, blue eyes, wears a pink and white gingham dress with tiny puffed cap sleeves, and a full length white eyelet apron.

PLUCK, Keeper of the Gardens. He is a fruit tree specialist, married to Pick, father of Actavia (see Pick).

PORCHIA, a nosy porpoise who irritates Buddy, the barracuda, friend of Benjamin.

RAH, son of Lady Catherine and Sir Geophrey Lutrell, fraternal twin brother of Zyn. Richly tanned skin, long slender fingers, short groomed nails, walks confidently, muscular, violet blue eyes, 6‘2” tall, weighs 175 lbs., soft spoken, compassionate, very intelligent, hard working, respected by Muggles, wears a tan leather smock with braided leather and beaded belt, leather thong sandals with beaded straps wrapping up to his knees, braided silk bracelet, gold medallion, small drawstring pouch around his hips, lived with Nona in the tree house, until the completion of the Mill House.

SEYMOUR, a noble hawk who watches over Zyn, the Nevils, and Dezra.

SIR GEOPHREY, husband of Lady Catherine, died during the Thirty Year War, father of Rah and Zyn.

SPOONERS, see Naddie and Neddie.

STUBBY, fifteen-year-old Muggle/Nevil boy, short, wears his pants below his waist, tugs on others’ clothing.

TEETER, nineteen-year-old Muggle/Nevil, his body shivers all over like he is cold. He agrees with everyone while he is with them, very weak personality, former Keeper of the Aviary.

WALTER, the butler and friend of Lady Catherine and the House of Sheridan.

WINKLE, Keeper of the Bees.

WUSKERS, chartreuse and white cat with a big grin, very naughty, chases birds.

YUR, oldest male on Aura. He is the Elder, the only Keeper of the Ancient Book of Tales. He is the only grandfather on Aura, aged ninety-eight, with arthritic bowed legs, a thin bent over body. He uses a cane to walk, is hard of hearing, uses an ear horn, his mind wanders, he is sentimental, and he wears a red flannel shirt with tan pants and leather suspenders. He is married to Golda (see Golda).

ZYN, twin brother of Rah, leader of the Nevils, insecure and jealous of his brother, he leaves Aura for Dezra (see Rah).

N.K. Stouffer

N.K. (Nancy Kathleen) Stouffer, created the real Muggles and the Larry and Lilly Potter books in the 1980s. Like most writers, she draws on personal experience for her inspiration and ideas. For example, it was the playful manner her son as a toddler used to pinch her cheeks before kissing them and say he just “kissed her muggie” that led her to coin Muggles as the name of mythical characters in her books.

A native of Hershey, Pennsylvania, Stouffer began writing and illustrating as a young elementary school student. During her childhood she explored the woods of rural Pennsylvania with her grandfather who taught her about the area’s plant and animal life. He also loved to weave stories. Those treks in the woods often generate ideas for her stories and illustrations.

Stouffer includes two books of poetry among her work for children. In addition to books, she has written a screenplay with accompanying music and lyrics. Her talent extends to designing children’s toys and dolls. Growing up with learning disabilities, she maintains a strong interest in education and early childhood issues. This concern led her to conduct research about the connection between ultra violet light and color as it relates to learning and reading disabilities.

Today, Stouffer still lives in a small town in Pennsylvania where she continues to write, illustrate, and design children’s toys.

For more information about Nancy K. Stouffer, see her website at www.realmuggles.com